



Take a look at the following thought experiment and consider what your response would be if you were in that situation:

As part of a contest to win a million pounds, you've been dropped off in the middle of an unfamiliar city with no belongings apart from a credit card you can use for funds. Your job is to find and purchase a 'Humdinger'. Sounds simple, except you've got no idea what a 'Humdinger' is nor where to find one. To make matters even more complicated, you can't understand the language of anyone you meet. How do you go about buying a Humdinger?

What solution(s) did you come up with? We put the same question to a number of bright adults and children, and their responses help show the sheer variety of solutions intelligence helps you conjure up when faced with obstacles. We've included a few replies at the end of the chapter.

Able as they are to take in and process lots of information at once, it's possible for many intelligent people to swiftly pick up on social cues and react accordingly. This is easier for adults since, as we've mentioned, they've generally learned to moderate their own impulses in order not to stand out from the crowd. These 'social chameleons' can go one stage further and read a room when they enter it, quickly assessing the people they'll be interacting with before modifying their own behaviour to help ingratiate themselves.

These behavioural modifications can involve anything from altering body language and posture, picking particular topics of conversation while avoiding others, changing to a different vocabulary or even adjusting their accent. This isn't done to deceive anyone, and with enough practice it often happens subconsciously as a way of making other people feel comfortable around them. If two social circles happen to collide, it can make the social chameleon feel extremely anxious as they try to juggle 'being' two individuals at once.