

ONE Question for **Kathy Stearman**

The Power Of People-Watching

W

HILE THE IMAGE of a trench coat-wearing intelligence officer surveilling suspects from behind a newspaper is outdated, the ability to read people will always be central to intelligence. Kathy Stearman was a special agent with the FBI for more than two decades, rising to leadership roles few other women have reached. In her new book, *It's Not About the Gun: Lessons From My Global Career as a Female FBI Agent*, she reflects on how she navigated a male-dominated force and reveals the psychological skills crucial for her work.

—Abigail Fagan

Q: How did you learn to read

people? Watching my parents and siblings as a kid helped me learn to read people's faces. I would watch my mom and my siblings navigate around my father; they seemed to orbit him like planets around the sun. One little word or movement from him would make everybody sort of scatter. I thought, OK, this is a lesson for me. You have to pay attention to someone's facial expression and body language. They don't have to say a



word for you to know if they're happy, sad, or angry. I knew my mom was angry, for example, when she mashed her lips together and her mouth became this little slit.

Later, one of my favorite things was to sit in an airport and watch the other passengers. I could do it for hours. Whenever I had a long layover, I'd think, Aw, I get to people-watch!

You can learn so much about people if you just observe. I would look at their clothing and their shoes. When you travel internationally you can figure out where folks are from by their shoes—or at least you could before Nike and other brands became ubiquitous.

But there are some deceptive people out there. In investigations, I would ask suspects questions I already knew the answer to, questions they may not have been remotely aware I knew the answer to. Then I could identify what they did when they told the truth and what they did when they lied. Some people moved a lot when telling a lie—they moved their body in the chair or their hand motions became more frequent. Others became very still, almost immobile, and looked me straight in the eye, as if trying to convince me they were sincere.