

Listening: A dilemma

1 A dilemma is a situation where it is difficult to choose between two alternative actions. Read a famous dilemma created by the Dutch social scientist Fons Trompenaars. Decide what you would do. Would your choice depend on anything? What?

Imagine you're riding in your friend's car when he hits a pedestrian*. Your friend was driving at least 35 miles per hour in an area of the city where the maximum speed limit is 20 miles per hour. Nobody saw the accident. If you lied and said your friend was only driving at 20 miles per hour, it would save him from serious consequences. Would you lie to save your friend?

pedestrian: someone who is walking, not driving or riding a bicycle

2 **2.28** Listen to two people discussing the dilemma. Who would lie: the man or the woman?

Grammar: Second conditional

3 Listen again and complete the sentences with the missing verbs. Then answer the questions.

if + past, would

- 1 What **would** _____ to my friend **if** I _____ the truth?
- 2 But **if** the pedestrian _____, perhaps he'd _____ to prison.
- 3 But **if** the accident _____ serious, it'd _____ more important to tell the truth.

Look at the verb forms in the sentences.

- 4 What form is used after *would*? _____
- 5 What form is used after *if*? _____
- 6 Are these sentences about ...
 - a past time?
 - b an imaginary future time?

In second conditional structures, we sometimes use *were* instead of *was* after *if*.

If the accident were serious ...

If the accident was serious ...

Were is rather formal. In spoken English, people usually say *was*.

>> For more information on the second conditional, see page 171.

4 Complete these second conditional statements. Use the correct form of the verbs in the box.

tell not lie be have not have do support happen

- 1 The world would be a worse place if we _____ friends we could trust.
- 2 I can trust my friend. If something bad _____, she would _____ the truth.
- 3 I can trust my friend. If I _____ a problem, he would _____ me.
- 4 If a friend of mine _____ something wrong, I _____ to save them.

5 Fons Trompenaars gave the dilemma about the pedestrian to people in 31 different countries. Read about his results and answer these questions.

- 1 How did most Americans answer the dilemma?
- 2 What do you think the results would be in your country? Why?

How we trust

People around the world answered the pedestrian dilemma rather differently. People in Switzerland and the USA generally placed a high value on the truth and the law. Ninety-seven per cent and 93% said they wouldn't lie. But the figure was lower in other countries, and more people felt they should support their friend. For example, in France the figure was 73%, Japan 68%, India 54%, South Korea 37% and Venezuela 32%.

Of course everyone wants to think their friends will do the right thing and everyone one wants friends they feel they can trust. But compare these two views. They are both logical in their own way:

- 1 *If something bad happened, this person would tell the truth, so I can trust them.*
- 2 *If something bad happened, this person would support me, so I can trust them.*

6 Look at some more dilemmas. Write sentences about what you would do in each situation.

1 Your boss wants you to call a competitor and pretend to be a potential customer in order to get information about their products.

If my boss asked me to do this, I wouldn't because ...
If this happened to me, I'd make the call because ...

2 A supplier wants to know where their cheque is. Your boss has told you to say it's in the post but you know that's not true.

3 You're a food critic for a newspaper and your best friend owns a restaurant. They want you to write a very favourable review. You think the food is OK but nothing special.

4 You're a student on an MBA course. One of your classmates pays someone he found on the internet to write his homework assignments. He asked you not to tell the teacher.

5 You helped your son to do his school science project and he didn't tell his teacher. If the teacher asks 'Did he do it all himself?' he wants you to say 'Yes'.

6 You need your husband/wife's signature urgently on a document. They're travelling on business. They say, 'Just forge* it and sign the document in my name.'

forge: produce a signature, document or picture and pretend that someone else produced it

7 Compare your answers with a partner. Would your decisions depend on anything? If so, what?