

Body Language

PpD
(Personal and professional Development)

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Outline:

This module provides a basic and very general introduction to the issue of body language. It is designed to make people aware of the more common body gestures and what they might, or might not mean.

Objectives

- To better understand ones own use of body language
- To better understand other peoples body language
- To use body language as an advantage in meeting situations.

Target

Any one who has an interest in the area. The unit can be done in groups of any size.



1 Body Language

Body language is the way that we hold and move our bodies when we are giving or receiving information. There are two broad types of body language: open body language and closed body language. Some body language theorists say that these are very old behaviours which date back to our early ancestors. By maintaining open body language, our ancestors showed that they had no concealed weapons hidden behind their back, their armpits or in their hands. By opening our hands, unfolding our arms and bodies we still show that we mean the other person no harm. When we have closed body language, we appear to be physically showing that we are hiding something from the other person and this can be threatening to them. These messages are often received subconsciously by the other person who starts to distrust our words and what we mean by them. An open manner is a good start to an open, frank conversation.

2 Harnessing The Power Of Body Language

<http://www.salesdoctors.com/diagnosis/3body1.htm>

All of us are trained in the use of speech, to communicate what we mean in a way that other people will understand. And most of the time, others understand what we mean. In a telephone conversation, we communicate through speech alone. In a face-to-face meeting, part of the communication is carried in a non-verbal form, what is often called body language.

Why is body language so important? There are two principal reasons:

- You have probably heard many times that people remember more of what they see than what they hear. Long after a meeting, we are likely to have forgotten the exact words someone used, but we may retain a vivid image of the same person's facial expression.
- Through life experience we have learned, perhaps unconsciously, that people often lie with words. (We're talking here about the little white lies and omissions that are part of many conversations.) But facial expressions and other body language tend to be more honest. When a person's words and body language are consistent, we believe that person. When their words and body language say different things, we tend to believe the body language and doubt the words.

Picture this scenario: You say to a friend, "How was your review with the boss?" Your friend says, "OK" Then her smile vanishes and her hand tightens around the notebook she is carrying. Did your friend really do OK in that review? Probably not, but she does not want to talk about her true feelings right now. When a person's facial expression differs from their words, your experience tells you to go with the visual cues, not the words.



3 The Vocabulary Of Body Language

Body language, unlike spoken language, is inexact; so you have to be careful about how you interpret it. A certain movement or facial expression may be quite meaningful, or it may mean nothing at all. As a starting point, the following sections provide you with some common body language terms and their generally-accepted meanings.

3.1 *Positive Body Language*

Positive body language is generally quite reliable as an indicator of a person's feelings. It signals interest in the other person and in the conversation.

Relaxed posture - Comfortably seated, relaxed breathing, no visible stiffness or abrupt movements. These indicate no major barriers to communication.

Arms relaxed - Uncrossed arms and hands open (palms up or otherwise visible to the other person) are signs of openness.

Good eye contact - Looking in the other person's eyes, particularly when they are speaking, indicates interest in that person. Proper eye contact involves looking away occasionally to avoid staring.

Nodding agreement - When nods are used to punctuate key things the other person has said, they signal agreement, interest and understanding. However, continual unconscious bobbing of the head usually indicates that the listener is tuning out.

Taking notes - Shows interest and involvement, particularly if notes are on what the other person is saying.

Smiling/adding humour - This is a very positive sign. It signals a warm personal relationship.

Leaning closer - Reducing the distance between two people, particularly when the other person is speaking. Indicates interest is up and barriers are down.

Gesturing warmly - Talking with hands, particularly with palms open, indicates involvement in the conversation and openness to the other person.

For all of these positive gestures, moderation is the rule. When they are exaggerated, they can become more negative than positive.

3.2 *Negative Body Language*

Negative body language is somewhat less reliable as an indicator of the person's comfort with the current conversation than positive body language. Actions that are generally considered negative may just be a matter of comfort for this person, may indicate that the person is tired, or may result from other matters that are weighing on this person's mind.

Body tense - Stiffness, wrinkled brow, jerky body motion, hands clasped in front or palms down on the table. These can indicate concern with the topic or dealing with the other person.



Arms folded in front - Creates a barrier; can express resistance to what is being said.

Hand on face - A hand over one's mouth is a closed gesture. Leaning on one's elbow with the chin in the hand can communicate boredom.

Fidgeting - Moving around a lot, playing with things and drumming fingers are usually a sign of boredom, nervousness or impatience.

Arms behind head, leaning back - In a well-established relationship this can be a relaxed gesture. In a new relationship, it is often used to express a desire for control or power.

Yawning - Boredom, confusion. The other person is talking too much or in too much technical detail.

Impatience - Trying to interrupt what the other person is saying, opening one's mouth frequently as if to speak.

Distraction - Eyes flicking about, blank stares, flipping through literature without really reading it, looking at others in the office, looking at the person's body or clothing.

Leaning away - Avoiding moving closer, even when something is handed to the person, is strongly negative.

Negative facial expressions - These include shaking head, eyes narrowed, scowling, frowning.

4 Combinations Count More Than Individual Gestures

Body language is more meaningful when several expressions take place at the same time. For example, the combination of leaning forward, nodding and smiling is a strong indication of agreement and openness. Most meaningful is a matched set of gestures which also agrees with what the person is saying.

5 Transitions Count More Than Positions

As a rule of thumb, individual body positions or movements are frequently meaningless. Some people's faces form a smile or a frown more naturally than a neutral expression. Some people lean on their hand all the time; others never do it. Some people can't sit in a chair for more than a few minutes without crossing their arms; others sit erect with their hands at their sides.

What is meaningful, however, is a transition from one body position to another. If a person spends the entire meeting leaning forward, that may be just comfort. But if the same person starts out leaning back and then gradually moves forward as the meeting progresses, that's non-verbal communication.

6 Observing Other's Body Language

From the moment you greet the person, observe their body language. At the beginning of the meeting, it is normal for people to appear somewhat reserved or nervous. If this is a new relationship, the person may not be ready to trust you yet. As the meeting progresses, the person should normally warm up and begin to display more open body language.

Pay particular attention to any changes in the persons body language, both positive and negative. Positive moves are buying signals - you are on the right track and should keep going in the direction where you are headed. Negative moves are objections. They mean that you and the person are beginning to diverge. Stop the track you are on and get back in synch with the person:

- If the persons body language is expressing discomfort or disagreement with what you are saying, you need to uncover the basis for the persons discomfort and restore the positive track.
- If the person is dropping out of the conversation, it is time to stop talking and ask an open-ended question to get the person involved again. The more the person has drifted from the conversation, the more you must go back to the persons goals and background - something the person knows a lot about and cares about.

7 Reading Body Language

Knowing how to read body language is a useful communication skill. So is knowing how to use it. There are two basic groups of body language postures: OPEN/CLOSED and FORWARD/BACK

OPEN/CLOSED is the most obvious. People with arms folded and legs crossed and bodies turned away are signalling that they are rejecting messages. People showing open hands, fully facing you and both feet planted on the ground are accepting them.

FORWARD/BACK indicates whether people are actively or passively reacting to communication. When they are leaning forward and pointing towards you they are actively accepting or rejecting the message. When they are leaning back, looking up at the ceiling, doodling on a pad, cleaning their glasses they are either passively absorbing or ignoring it.



The posture groups combine to create four basic modes: responsive, reflective, combative and fugitive.

7.1 *Responsive*

In responsive mode, OPEN/FORWARD the person is actively accepting. This is the time to close the sale, ask for agreement, demand a concession



Things to watch for when you or someone else is in the fugitive state.

ENGAGED leaning forward, open body, open arms, open hands

EAGER (sprint position), open legs, feet under chair, on toes, leaning forward

READY TO AGREE closes papers, pen down, hands flat on table

7.2 *Reflective*

In reflective mode, OPEN/BACK, people are interested and receptive but not actively accepting. Trying to close the sale or asking for agreement now may drive them away into fugitive mode. This is the time to present further facts and incentives. It may also be a good time to keep quiet and let them think.



Things to watch for when you or someone else is in the fugitive state.

LISTENING head tilted, lots of eye contact, nodding, high blink rate

EVALUATING sucks glasses/pencil, strokes chin, looks up & right, legs crossed in 4 pos(ankleonknee)

ATTENTIVE (standing) arms behind back, smile, open feet

7.3 Fugitive

In fugitive mode, CLOSED/BACK, people are trying to escape physically through the door or mentally into boredom. This is the time to spark interest in any way you can, even irrelevant to the message.



Things to watch for when you or someone else is in the fugitive state.

DEFENSIVE (standing) will see feet pointing in, hands clenched

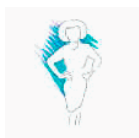
BORED staring into space, slumped posture, doodling, foot tapping

LET ME GO feet towards door, looking around, buttoning jacket

REJECTION sitting/moving back, arms folded, legs crossed 11 pos (thigh on knee), head down, frown

7.4 Combative

Finally, in combative mode, CLOSED/FORWARD, there is active resistance. This is the time to defuse anger, avoid contradiction and outright argument and to steer them into reflective mode.



Things to watch for when you or someone else is in the Combative state.

LET ME SPEAK finger tapping, foot tapping, staring

AGGRESSIVE leaning forwards, finger pointing, fists clenched

DEFIANT (standing), hands on hips, frown

LYING touches face, hand over mouth, pulls ear, eyes down, glances at you, shifts in seat, looks down and to left



7 Instructors Notes and Handouts

It is important to encourage people to get involved and really participate in this module. One option is to get them talking initially about what they understand body language to be. From here get them to give some examples of body language that they are aware of.

In terms of the open/closed/forward/back examples given in the material it might help to think in the following terms;

- Open - listening
- Closed - Ignoring

- Forward - engaging
- Back - passive

This is a fun module that people should have a good laugh with while at the same time picking up some useful skills. It is a good idea to encourage people to people watch. Ask people to take notice of others and themselves in social and work situations.

It is important to stress that the value of this unit lies in the participant being aware of their own body language as much as being aware of someone else's.

Human conversation is a complex process involving facial expressions, words, tone of voice and body gestures. Many signals are sent and many non-verbal cues are interchanged. There are estimations that the total impact of a message is about 7 percent verbal (voice only), 38 percent vocal (tone of voice) and 55 percent non-verbal (body language). A Body Language Approach to Tele Presence, Bogumil Hausman, Kaj Nygren, Media Lab, Ericsson Telecom AB, S-126 25 Stockholm, Sweden, <http://www.ericsson.se/medialab>

A handshake can be soft, firm, brief, long, or even painful. The way you shake hands provides clues to your personality. Aggressive people have firm handshakes. People with low self esteem often have a limp handshake. Politicians typically shake your hand with their other hand covering the shake or holding your elbow. Domineering men often squeeze the hand of women during a greeting. The clever woman moves her index and little finger in toward her palm preventing a crushing handshake. This negates his dominant act and keeps her in equal control. So adopt a handshake that is firm, yet not crushing. Convey confidence and professionalism, not dominance.

Unbuttoning a suit jacket in front of a prospect will signify an open attitude, that you're willing to talk, to negotiate. Taking off your jacket is really powerful. And rolling your shirt sleeves up suggests that you're ready to get down to the final price.

With a technique called "tracking," you mirror their body language, and then gradually move them toward a more positive posture and psychological openness. As they shift their posture to mimic yours, their attitudes will shift, and you can close on the sale.

If they cover their mouth, touch their nose or touch near an eye, they are withdrawing.

Avoid fidgeting or appearing nervous.

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Lift activity

Next time you walk on to a crowded elevator, don't turn around and face the door. Instead, just stand there facing the others. If you want to create even more tension, grin. Very likely the other passengers will glare back, surprised, grim, and upset.

Reason? You have broken the rules. This demonstrates how, even in the most mundane situations, we have a silent set of rules for bodily behavior in public settings.

RIGHT, WRONG, OR RUDE

- Handshake - Although generally adopted around the world. Southeast Asians press together; Japanese bow; Middle Easterners and many Asians favour a gently grip.
- DIRECT EYE CONTACT - Asians, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, African American, Native Americans considered it to be rude, or disrespectful, or intimidating, or may indicate sexual overtones.
- WAVING - "No" to most Europeans. Europeans raise the arm and "Bob" the hand up and down at the wrist."
- BECKONING - Europeans and Asians raise the arm, palm facing down, and make a scratching motion with fingers. In Australia and in Indonesia, curling the index finger is used for beckoning animals.
- "V" FOR VICTORY--In England, palm facing inward toward the face is an obscene gesture.
- THE O.K GESTURE--In France it means zero. In Japan it means money or coins. In Brazil, Germany, and the former USSR., it is obscene gesture.
- THUMBS UP --Also used for hitch-hiking in American. In Nigeria a rude gesture. In Australia, if pumped up and down is an obscene gesture. In Germany and Japan, the signal for "one."
- WHISTLING--Throughout Europe, whistling at public events is a signal of disapproval, even derision.
- NODDING AND SHAKING HEAD--Opposite meaning in Bulgaria, parts of Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, and Bengal.
- CRAZY-- In Argentina, "you have telephone call."

<http://www.csupomona.edu/~tassi/gestures.htm>



Distance

0 - 0.5m	Intimate zone
0.5 - 1.2m	Personal zone
1.2 - 4.0m	Social zone
4.0m -	Public zone

Greetings

- Bowing
- Handshake
- Kissing

Eye Contact

- Avoidance
- Essential

Stance

Open v's closed