NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING OTHERS AND COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

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Why is Non-Verbal Communication Important?

Research shows it takes 4 minutes to make a first impression.

According to studies by UCLA professor Albert Mehrabian, body language accounts for 55% of a first impression; 38% comes from tone of voice; 7% comes from our actual words.

Non-verbal cues are important when communicating feelings and attitudes.

When your verbal and non-verbal communication are incongruent, people will believe the non-verbal.


Some Notes:

- Body language comes in clusters of signals and postures. Recognizing a whole cluster is far more reliable than trying to interpret individual elements.

- Body language is culturally dependent – gestures that are acceptable in one culture can be offensive in another culture; gestures that are acceptable in one culture are offensive in another, etc.

- Individual gestures can indicate more than one thing (crossed arms can indicate anger or being cold).

- Your attitude can follow your body language – sitting/standing in a closed position will result in a more closed attitude.
Seven Important Non-Verbal Issues

- Space
- Expressiveness
- Hands and ... Arms
- Feet
- Hand Shakes
Space

♀ Women often make themselves “small”.
  … Sit with legs crossed, hands in lap
  … Materials stacked neatly on desk/table
  … Sit tucked under the table

♂ Men tend to take up lots of space.
  … Sit with figure four legs or feet on floor, arms on side of chair or spread out on table
  … Materials spread out
  … Sit pushed back from table

Taking Up Space = Dominance/Control
Expressiveness

Smiling Too Much

... MRI scans show when you’re smiled at, your brain lights up like you have received a reward.

... If you smile too much, others might not take you seriously.

Too Much Expressiveness

... Women are much more expressive than men.

... Men show a “poker face” so it's hard to read what they're thinking and where you stand.

... Women keep re-explaining their point and see no reaction, so they overdo it to make their case.
Hands and ...

There are more nerves between your hands and brain that any other body part so they give accurate cues.

Holding your own hands can show anxiety or restraint.

Hands in a tent show confidence or contemplation.

Open, palms up – honesty, receptiveness; closed, palms down – authority, unreceptive.

Hands can cover (mouth – lying, ears – hearing, heart – shock).

Hands can hide (behind back, in pockets, under table) to show unwillingness to talk or disagreement.
... Arms

Partial-Arm Cross

 Demonstrates anxiety and low self-confidence. It is a partial hug, a comforting position that indicates the person is trying to soothe their nerves.

Crossed Arms

 Demonstrates closed attitude - defiance, withdrawal, resistance (often with crossed legs) (also may indicated that someone is cold!!).

Crossed Arms Holding Each Other

 Demonstrates an attempt to control oneself and keep still.
Legs/Feet

People aren’t conscious of feet/legs and don’t control them, so they often accurately indicate feelings and attitudes.

ода Feet/legs often point in the direction someone wants to go or at someone or something they are interested in.

ода Open legs/stance show confidence and a relaxed posture.

oda Closed legs/feet may show anxiety.

oda Legs/ankles crossed and extended indicates comfort.

oda Legs/ankles crossed and tucked under a chair may shows anxiety.
Hand Shakes

When you shake hands with “Bob”, you communicate one of three things:

 يون (1) Bob can dominate me,

 يون (2) I can dominate Bob, or

 يون (3) I feel comfortable with Bob.

Aim for (3) - so your firmness needs to match Bob’s. Most women do a “wet fish” handshake, signaling that Bob can dominate (control) the situation.

In a handshake, the dominant person turns their palm down, while the more submissive person shakes with the palm facing up.

To achieve (3), aim for a straight up and down, firm handshake, three pumps.
How does Gender Affect Non-Verbal Communication?

Attributes that women in Western Culture are taught - politeness, deference, humility - and the way they are projected through our gestures, gait and self-presentation communicate subservience and meekness.

... Tilting your head—submission/flirting

... Folding your hands on your lap—hiding your hands signals untrustworthiness

... Crossing your legs—resistance or anxiety or being “small”

... Excessive smiling—lack of seriousness

... Folding your arms in front of you—insecurity or defensiveness

... Playing with or tugging at your hair, jewelry or clothes—distress or flirting.
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What can you do?

✿ Use a mirror

... practice speaking, watch your gestures, facial expressions, hands, feet, etc.

✿ Videotape Yourself

... see how many of these non-verbal cues you are sending

... Watch yourself (or others) with the sound off and concentrate on reading the non-verbal cues

✿ Release stress by scrunching your toes (not visible) versus twirling your hair, etc.

✿ Mirror the person with whom you are speaking

... The more you are like them, the more you will connect

... Are they speaking softly? Sitting forward in their chair? Sitting with a notebook in their lap? Smiling and laughing a lot?
References


Pease, B. and A. Pease, “Body Language,”