



## Managing Body Language

Non-verbal cues can give away secrets you'd never dream of sharing, so when going into a meeting or presentation, take the time to note your body language and the body language of those around you. Even when presenting to a large gathering, you can get a sense of the room based on the level of buzz that happens before you present. Are people laughing and standing close together? Whispering in groups of two and three? Are they standing as individuals and making little contact? If the mood of the room is solemn, then you may want to rethink starting with a dirty joke. Noting your own body language ensures you are not delivering conflicting messages. You could be saying one thing, while your body is saying something else. Nine out of ten times your body will convey a message more accurately and truthfully than anything you say.

Body language also provides you with indicators about whether or not you should continue a meeting or wrap it up. There is little value to continuing a meeting where officials have gone from attentive to glazed to outright bored. When they begin looking at their watch, folding and unfolding their arms, fidgeting in their seats or reading the material provided while you're presenting, it's time to leave. If the person you are meeting with has had enough, then you've said enough. No matter how long you keep talking after they stop listening, they are not getting the message. If you are going into a meeting as a team try to determine signals for bringing the meeting to an end or moving it along in advance. Then listen when you get the signal.

Mimicry can also be a helpful non-verbal tool in a meeting. This is simply copying someone's body language in a non-offensive way. If they sit forward, you sit forward, if they lean back with their legs crossed, assume a similar pose. Not only does this help build better rapport, but it also means that you are sending your brain quiet messages about how effective your communications are and whether you need to change tactics. If at some point you find yourself leaning back with your arms and legs folded, then you know that a message is being blocked or something about the message isn't sitting well. Just remember not to overdo it or you'll weird them out.

A few more physical tips:

- When shaking hands match the strength of your grip to theirs.
- Face your audience head-on.
- Avoid crossing your arms.
- Don't slouch in your seat or appear too passive.
- Avoid putting your hands in your pockets.
- Do not fidget with your hair, pens, coins ...
- Use gestures sparingly, keep them natural and spontaneous.
- Don't point a finger or raise a fist.
- Don't bang on the desk or the arm of your chair.
- Keep facial expressions natural and friendly, don't frown or raise a brow at a comment or question.
- Keep your presentation fresh by altering your vocal pitch, volume and rate of delivery.
- Speak clearly, enunciate, emphasize or punch certain words.
- Use simple language, avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Keep humour gentle.

Maintaining good eye contact is also an important component in face to face meetings. Eye contact is a tool that helps you appear sincere, demonstrates confidence, engages your audience and can help you confirm understanding or detect other signals. Don't stare (that's just creepy) but hold the connection for a few seconds or while you complete an idea.

Finally, be polite to everyone. Aside from being the kind of thing most civilized people learn in kindergarten, being impolite can have unanticipated consequences. How believable is your message that you are patient-centred or community-focused, if you have just blown off the receptionist and blustered your way past the assistant?

### True Story

A lobbyist and her client met with a stakeholder organization to gain support for a government relations campaign. The gentleman from the other organization sat with his arms folded across his chest as the client spoke.

During the presentation this gentleman continuously shook his head in the negative as he verbally indicated that the client could count on his support. The lobbyist knew before they left the room that stakeholder would be an obstruction to her client's objectives. She also knew that he was willing to be dishonest about it. That said a lot about his character and it provided her with enough information to better equip her client.

The subsequent communications materials were altered to reflect this consideration and when it became clear in meetings with government officials that the stakeholder had spoken against their issue, they were prepared.