



BODY LANGUAGE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

Has it ever occurred to you how much you are saying to people even when you are not speaking? Unless you are a master of disguise, you are constantly sending messages about your true thoughts and feelings whether you are using words or not.

Studies show that your words account for only 7% of the messages you convey. The remaining 93% is non-verbal. 55% of communication is based on what people see and the other 38% is transmitted through tone of voice. So think about it. In the business setting, people can see what you are not saying. If your body language doesn't match your words, you are wasting your time.

Eye contact is the most obvious way you communicate. When you are looking at the other person, you show interest. When you fail to make eye contact, you give the impression that the other person is of no importance. Maintain eye contact about 60% of the time in order to look interested, but not aggressive.

Facial expression is another form of non-verbal communication. A smile sends a positive message and is appropriate in all but a life and death situation. Smiling adds warmth and an aura of confidence. Others will be more receptive if you remember to check your expression.

Your mouth gives clues, too, and not just when you are speaking. Mouth movements, such as pursing your lips or twisting them to one side, can indicate that you are thinking about what you are hearing or that you are holding something back.

The position of your head speaks to people. Keeping your head straight, which is not the same as keeping your head on straight, will make you appear self-assured and authoritative. People will take you seriously. Tilt your head to one side if you want to come across as friendly and open.

How receptive you are is suggested by where you place your arms. Arms crossed or folded over your chest say that you have shut other people out and have no interest in them or what they are saying. This position can also say, "I don't agree with you." You might just be cold, but unless you shiver at the same time, the person in front of you may get the wrong message.

How you use your arms can help or hurt your image as well. Waving them about may show enthusiasm to some, but others see this gesture as one of uncertainty and immaturity. The best place for your arms is by your side. You will look confident and relaxed. If this is hard for you, do what you always do when you want to get better at something - practice. After a while, it will feel natural.

The angle of your body gives an indication to others about what's going through your head. Leaning in says, "Tell me more." Leaning away signals you've heard enough. Adding a nod of your head is another way to affirm that you are listening.

Posture is just as important as your grandmother always said it was. Sit or stand erect if you want to be seen as alert and enthusiastic. When you slump in your chair or lean on the wall, you look tired. No one wants to do business with someone who has no energy.

Control your hands by paying attention to where they are. In the business world, particularly when you deal with people from other cultures, your hands need to be seen. That would mean you should keep them out of your pockets and you should resist the urge to put them under the table or behind your back. Having your hands anywhere above the neck, fidgeting with your hair or rubbing your face, is unprofessional.

Legs talk, too. A lot of movement indicates nervousness. How and where you cross them tells others how you feel. The preferred positions for the polished professional are feet flat on the floor or legs crossed at the ankles. The least professional and most offensive position is resting one leg or ankle on top of your other knee. Some people call this the "Figure Four." It can make you look arrogant.

The distance you keep from others is crucial if you want to establish good rapport. Standing too close or "in someone's face" will mark you as pushy. Positioning yourself too far away will make you seem standoffish. Neither is what you want so find the happy medium. Most importantly, do what makes the other person feel comfortable. If the person with whom you are speaking keeps backing away from you, stop. Either that person needs space or you need a breath mint.

You may not be aware of what you are saying with your body, but others will get the message. Make sure it's the one you want to send.

(c) 2004, Lydia Ramsey. All rights in all media reserved.