

Non-verbal Communication

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What is Non-verbal Communication?

- You cannot say nothing!
- Try to sit for one minute without speaking.
- Even if you are able to keep from moving you will still communicate rigidity, anxiety, or something.
- We are always saying something.
- It is important to observe and try to understand what is being communicated.
- In many situations people say what they think intellectually rather than what they feel emotionally.
- There is some truth in the old cliché: actions speak louder than words.
- Body language, carefully observed and interpreted, can tell a lot about what others are feeling.

Can we learn new ways of non-verbal communication?

- Nonverbal communication is learned and practiced often on an unconscious level.
- We attract people by using these nonverbal signals, and sometimes those we attract (or who are attracted to us) are unwholesome.
- As we grow older and become more aware of ourselves we should be able to recognize and weed out the unwholesome in favor of those for whom we have an affinity.
- Body language can be disguised behind a mask out of a fear of rejection.
- This can discourage wanted and needed relationships from developing.
- Those who want to work in helping relationships must relearn their nonverbal skills and unmask themselves in order to avoid alienation or turning off our clients.

Why we must be careful in interpreting others' non-verbal communications

- Body language is open to misinterpretation just as verbal communication is.
- It must be interpreted in the context of one's lifestyle, family, cultural background, and other factors that may be obscure.
- Each person has a limited repertoire of gestures and uses the same gestures to signify certain feelings.
- Gestures also can occur in clusters, so that while any particular gesture alone may not mean much, when it is reinforced by other gestures in a cluster the feeling or attitude being projected is confirmed.

Non-verbal gestures for: openness & confidence

- open hands, palms up
- unbuttoning or removing jacket (men)
- eye contact
- smile, leaning forward, relaxed
- hands away from face, possibly behind back
- standing straight, feet slightly apart, shoulders squared
- hand in belt, thumb hooked in waist
- clucking
- snapping fingers
- smacking palm

Non-verbal gestures for: cooperation & readiness

- standing with hands on hips, feet apart, head tilted
- uncrossed legs
- a person moves closer to another
- unbuttoned coat (men)
- head cocked, finger to face, blinking or squinting
- welcoming handshake
- open arms or hands (palms out)
- smile
- eye contact
- rubbing palms together indicating expectation of something pleasant
- hand to chest in a man indicates loyalty (but in a woman it is defensiveness)
- touching, patting, holding hands to give reassurance

Non-verbal gestures for: professional in approach

- taking notes
- evaluation gestures especially hand to face
- leaning forward
- use of space in seating so as to avoid barriers
- eye contact
- Lincolnesque position
- absence of gestures indicative of dominance, indifference, defensiveness, etc.
- Take notice of gestures signifying a desire to interrupt: “school” gesture of raising hand displaced to tugging ear or just raising hand from table and then dropping back
- index finger to lip to restrain from interrupting
- hand on arm of speaker

Non-verbal gestures for: indifference or boredom

- leg over arm of chair
- rhythmic drumming, tapping
- legs crossed
- shaking one foot (women)
- straighten up then slouch
- cold shoulder: turning away especially toward exit
- glancing at exit
- rigid, unmoving posture with fixed stare
- yawning
- hand holding up face, drooping eyelids
- fidget or rock
- turning up nose and/or “tsk” sound (signifying disgust)

Non-verbal gestures for: evaluation or interest

- hand to cheek gesture in style of Rodin's The Thinker statue
- slight blinking or squinting
- chin stroking
- hands touching face especially upper lip
- leaning forward (positive) and leaning back (negative)
- head tilted, ear cocked
- peering over top of glasses
- sucking on tip of pencil or earpiece of glasses indicates wish for nourishment in form of more information
- arched eyebrows
- licking lips
- wrinkling nose
- scratching head
- ruffling hair

Non-verbal gestures for: doubt

- pacing
- hand over nose
- eyes closed
- brow furrowed
- arched eyebrows
- frown
- scratching in front of ear
- rubbing eyes
- hand to face gestures (evaluative)
- scratching head
- pinching bridge of nose, especially with head lowered
- pacing with head down and hands behind back or just standing—unwise to interrupt a person thus engaged

Non-verbal gestures for: suspicion or secretiveness

- folded arms, moving away from another
- crossed legs
- head tilted forward
- rubbing nose
- lack of eye contact
- hand covering mouth
- scratching in front of ear
- frown
- stolen look, sideways glance
- crunching in with head down
- sideways positioning
- “poker face”
- deception indicated by lack of eye contact
- anxiety gestures
- looking at floor
- frequent swallowing
- wetting lips
- throat clearing
- scratching head

Non-verbal gestures for: need for reassurance

- clenched hands with thumbs rubbing
- stroking arms
- cuticle picking
- hand pinching sucking on pen, glasses, etc.
- touching chair before sitting
- hand to throat (women) often displaced to seemingly checking to see if necklace is still there

Non-verbal gestures for: anxiety

- nail biting
- finger movement
- sighing
- hand wringing
- rapid, twitchy movements
- clearing throat
- tremors, especially knees
- heavy breathing
- voice strained
- lips quivering
- rapid eye movement
- rigidity
- crossed fingers
- chewing on things

Non-verbal gestures for: frustration, anger

- making fists
- hands on hips
- stomping
- if sitting – on edge of chair (ready for action)
- chin out
- kicking the ground
- lips pressed together, jaw muscles tight
- running fingers through hair
- rubbing back of neck
- hand in pocket
- snorting
- clenched hands with white knuckles
- pointing or jabbing
- hot under collar
- putting out cigarette especially if with grinding motion
- change in skin color
- hostile stare

Non-verbal gestures for: defensiveness

- hands in pocket
- hands behind back
- clenched hands
- men with jackets button up
- folded arms (can be reinforced by making fists)
- crossed legs
- body twisted away, moving away, sitting back
- looking at door
- head tilted forward, possibly squinting
- stalling for time by cleaning glasses, rearranging, etc.
- hand rubbing back of neck.

Non-verbal gestures for: self-control, inner conflict

- hand holding wrist or arm
- arm locked behind back
- locked ankles
- gripping arms of chair as in dentist's chair
- suppressed gestures or displacement activities such as fist clenched hidden in pocket
- hand to mouth in astonishment or fear (suppressed scream)
- hand rubbing back of neck, running fingers through hair (displaced hitting out), “stiff upper lip” or reacting as little as possible
- blowing nose and coughing (disguised tears)

Non-verbal gestures for: dominating

- elevating self, like standing when others are sitting
- taking a different posture than others in a group, especially hands behind head
- sitting straddling the chair
- standing with arms spread and hands gripping desk or table
- loud voice or low voice carefully enunciated
- standing or walking with hands behind back and chin up
- thumbs in lapels

Non-verbal gestures for: superior and subordinate

- the superior usually has hand on top in a handshake while the person who is subordinate offers his hand with palm up
- the superior makes the motion to terminate the encounter
- the superior can violate the subordinate's space, and can express doubt, evaluation, domineering gestures
- the subordinate is more likely to signify self-control, anxiety, defensiveness gesture clusters
- when putting feet on desk the superior should recognize that subordinates dislike this gesture, superiors pretend to ignore it, and equals take little note of it

Non-verbal gestures for: flirtation, courtship

- (lovers and couples) positioning to block out others
- preening gestures such as smoothing hair, adjusting clothes
- gaze holding
- head arching
- stroking own thigh or arm (in general, stroking and fondling indicates need for affection, reassurance)
- touching
- A couple with strained relations avoids touching (withdraw if touch by accident) and are formally polite
- Unmarried (courting) couples tend to stay together at gatherings while married couples tend to pair off with the men all standing together and the women going off together
- In couples where one partner is concerned about the seductiveness of the other, rights of possession are signaled by touching (arm around waist, taking by hand, hand on shoulder)

The difference between open and closed gestures

- Our gestures oftentimes tell something about us that we are not able or willing to communicate verbally. Here is a partial list of “open” and “closed” gestures
- “open” are present when a person is ready and willing to communicate
- “closed” are present when there may be something standing in the way of honest, complete communication
- These gestures can be observed in spouse relationships, parent–child relationships, supervisor–worker relationships, worker–client relationships, and any other time that two people are communicating.
- Maybe you will discover that your body language has been “telling” on you!

Open gestures

- open hands
- palms up
- unbuttoning jacket
- spontaneous eye contact
- smile
- leaning forward
- relaxed
- hands away from face
- standing straight
- feet apart
- shoulders squared
- uncrossed legs
- welcoming handshake
- patting
- rubbing palms together
- affirmative head nods
- direct face to face eye contact
- calm use of facial movements
- body positioned toward other
- seating arrangement with no barriers

Closed gestures

- hand covering mouth
- making fists
- peering over top of glasses
- glancing at exit
- frown
- leaning back
- rigid posture
- looking at floor
- moving away from the speaker or listener
- legs crossed, shaking foot
- fidgeting
- locked ankles
- folded arms
- cold shoulder
- open palm tapping
- hand wringing
- head lowered
- lack of eye contact
- staring or eyes closed
- rocking
- stalling for time (looking at text messages on phone, clean glasses, etc.)

Nonverbal Tips for Improved Communication

- Make yourself comfortable with the other. Avoid being too close or too far away physically. (Within two feet is a comfortable range.)
- Be relaxed and attentive. To gain acceptance lean slightly toward the other. Avoid slouching or sitting rigidly.
- Maintain frequent eye contact. Avoid staring, glaring, or looking away.
- Give nonverbal communication while the other is talking, such as a simple nod of approval.
- Keep gestures smooth and unobtrusive. Don't let them compete for attention with your words. Avoid letting your gestures reveal emotional frustration.
- Your rate of speech should be average or a bit slower. Avoid sounding impatient or hesitant. Control the tone of your voice. Avoid sounding cold and harsh.
- Maintain a clearly audible voice—neither too loud nor too soft.
- Your feet and legs should be unobtrusive. Avoid using them as a barrier.
- Smile when appropriate; look pleasant and genuine.
- Stay alert through long conversations. Closing eyes and yawning usually blocks communication.