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Growth and Leadership

Is Your Body Language Helping or Hurting Your Business?

by Laurie Hayes

Did you know that between 60-75 percent of your communication is nonverbal?

Knowing this and learning how to adapt your body language to improve rapport, build credibility and strengthen relationships will have a powerful impact on your business' bottom line.

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Once you understand some basic interpretations of body language, you will also know how to respond more favorably to others by paying attention to what they're saying without words.

Following are 11 items to be cognizant of when communicating with others.

1. If circumstances require you to appear more powerful, stand instead of sit. Taking up more space sends an unconscious message of superiority and power. If standing is inappropriate, you can accomplish the same result by stretching your legs out or by having your arms on the side of your chair.
2. Many people move their heads to get approval from others, but if you want to appear more powerful, keep your head movements to a minimum.



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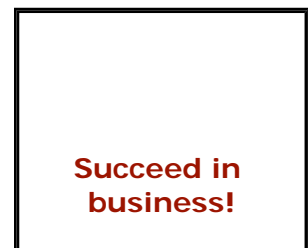
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3. Pay attention to your hands. Hands that are formed in a pyramid shape (fingers and thumbs on both hands touching, with palms wide apart) indicate power. This is referred to as "steeping" and communicates your intellect. Animate your body when you speak. Studies show that gestures give the listener confidence in the speaker.

4. Sometimes, when you are around people you don't know, you may perfect your hair or fiddle with your clothes. This is referred to as "grooming" and subconsciously communicates your desire to appear more presentable which will in turn, boost your confidence. When you find yourself in situations where strangers surround you, be aware of this tendency and keep it in check.

5. Show your abdomen (belly) to indicate confidence and trustworthiness. Many men and women cross their arms to hide expanding waistlines or because they're self-conscious of their chests, however, this gesture can be interpreted as being close-minded, detached and deceitful.

6. Mirror other's body movement where appropriate. We are attracted to others who are similar to ourselves, so if you want to establish rapport with someone, mirror their body movements. The important thing to remember is to be subtle. If you are obvious in your actions or overdo it, you may create offense.

7. Keep your hands away from your hair. Playing with your hair indicates lack of confidence.

8. If you are a man and want a woman to be comfortable with you, do whatever you can to keep your eye level below hers. Women are on average 5.5 inches shorter than men and have negative feelings when engaged in conversation with men ranging from inadequacy to resentment to frustration. These feelings are tamed when you sit so that your eye level is lower than hers.

9. Maintain eye contact. The eyes are the most expressive part of the human body and making eye contact is critical to successful social interaction. It signifies respect and attention. It tells the person you are speaking with, "I am more interested in you than anything else at this time."

If you avoid looking into someone's eyes, you may be perceived as dishonest, anxious or disinterested, or that you perceive yourself to be of higher status so that eye contact isn't necessary.

In order to maintain steady eye contact without staring and creating discomfort, maintain eye contact for between one and ten seconds at a time -- more so while listening than talking.



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10. Be aware of your leg positioning when sitting with a [prospect](#) or client. Sitting with your legs crossed and one foot kicking slightly communicates boredom. Sit with your legs slightly apart to indicate that you are open and relaxed.

11. Lean into it gradually. For years [communications](#) experts recommended leaning towards others promptly when engaged in conversation as a means of building rapport, but subsequent studies have shown that leaning towards someone too early in a conversation causes a negative reaction by creating discomfort and higher levels of dislike for that person.

If you find yourself conducting business on a global or multi-cultural basis, it is imperative that you educate yourself on the interpretation of body language and hand gestures. For example, a light-hearted gesture in North America may be regarded as offensive in another part of the world.

Communications with elders, women, men and in specific settings also differ significantly between cultures.

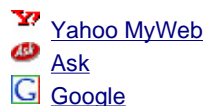
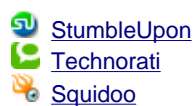
There are many helpful tips and tools to help you ensure you are communicating as effectively and engagingly as possible. If you feel your [communications skills](#) could use a little time and attention, specifically in the area of body language, there are hundreds of resources to help you accomplish your goal.

As you begin your quest for communication improvement, start with the basics -- SMILE.

A genuine smile is the first step to opening doors, warming hearts and building trusting, respectful relationships.

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Laurie Hayes, founder and visionary behind The HBB Source, helps government and corporate employees break free of their jobs to live their dream of entrepreneurship. To subscribe to her FREE e-zine for valuable resources designed to create home [business success](#), visit <http://www.thehbbsource.com>.



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