
UNDERSTANDING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Shaking Hands

- A firm handshake indicates confidence.
- A limp handshake indicates a person who is ill at ease.
- Downward facing palms indicate control; upward facing palms show submissiveness.
- A double clasp (using both hands) indicates sincere feelings for another.

Defensiveness

- Arms crossed on chest, scowl on face; also a sign of disagreement
- Closed fists; also a sign of nervousness
- Sitting with a leg over the arm of a chair; also a sign of indifference
- Crossed legs; moving of the crossed leg in a slight kicking motion signifies boredom or impatience

Openness

- Open hands with palms facing upward
- A man, who is open or friendly and feels agreement is near will unbutton his coat and then take it off.
- Arms and legs not crossed

Evaluation

- Hand-to-cheek gestures; an interested person will lean his body forward and slightly tilt his head.
- A critical evaluation is given when the hand is brought to the face, the chin is in the palm, the index finger is extended along the cheek, and the remaining fingers are positioned below the mouth.
- A head tilt is a definite sign of interest.
- Back and forth stroking of the chin signals a person who is deep in thought or seriously evaluating a situation.
- Direct eye contact indicates interest and a positive awareness of the speaker.

Suspicion and Secretiveness

- Left-hand gestures are typically associated with dishonesty.
- A person who avoids eye contact while speaking is likely concealing information.
- Touching or rubbing the nose, usually with the left index finger, is a sign of doubt or non-truth on the part of the speaker.
- Rubbing behind or beside the left ear with the left index finger when weighing an answer, indicates doubt.
- Tugging at the left eye with the left index finger says, "Do not see very clearly what I'm saying, because I'm lying to you."
- Fake cough or yawn; increased swallowing, increased face touching, mouth shrugs; all indicate unpleasant truths.
- Watch for an increase in *emblems* (gestures used in place of words); a decrease in *illustrators* (gestures used to illustrate speech) and an increase in *manipulators* (unnecessary gestures).

Honesty/Trustworthiness

- Right hand over heart
- Palms-up gestures, uncrossed arms
- Direct eye contact
- Anchoring gestures
- Feet flat on floor or pointed toward target

Frustration

- Short breaths; a person who is angry will take short breaths and expel air through his nostrils
- "Tsk"; the sound usually made to communicate disgust
- Tightly clenched hands
- Wringing of the hands
- Kicking the ground or an imaginary object while walking

Confidence

- Steepling (hands or arms brought together to seemingly form a church steeple)
- Hands joined together at waist behind back
- Feet placed up on desk
- Erect posture, direct eye contact, genuine smile, no self touching



Boredom

- Drumming on table
- Tapping with feet
- Head in hand
- Doodling

Nervousness

- Clearing throat
- “Whew” sound
- Whistling
- Smoking cigarettes
- Fidgeting in a chair
- Tugging at pants while sitting
- Jangling money in pockets
- Tugging at ear
- Clenching fists
- Wringing of the hands
- Playing with pencils, notebooks, or placing eyeglasses in mouth
- Frequent self touching while speaking
- Avoiding eye contact or looking down
- Rocking, slouching, twisting hair

Become a Skillful Communicator

- Perfect your handshake; always extend your hand first.
- Provide nonverbal feedback (nod, smile, mirror, vary vocal pitch) based on your meeting partner’s preferred learning style (visual, auditory, or action).
- Redirect questions if your meeting partner signals doubt—ask open questions, restate definites, and continue to display positive, supportive gestures.
- Create clear symmetry in your face and body; shoulders straight, weight balanced equally on both feet, arms to the sides.
- Use gestures to punctuate specific points; try to keep hands within an imaginary box that stretches from hipline to chin and shoulder to shoulder.

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