



INTERPERSONAL SKILL

Non-Verbal Communication



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Non-Verbal Communication Skills



Communication is not just about what comes out of our mouths. In fact, what we don't say --- our body language, voice intonation and use of silence ---- often sends a louder message to other people than the words we say. Unless we actively practice non-verbal communication skills, we can't really be sure if we're actually sending the message that we want to send.

Body Language



Body language refers to the messages we send to other people through our posture, facial expression, gestures, and bodily movements.

It is believed that a listener pays more attention to body language than verbal messages. This implies that if one's body language is inconsistent with the verbal message being sent (e.g. frowning while saying you're happy), the verbal message

becomes less credible. In fact, such inconsistency can even nullify the verbal message, and result to the verbal message being perceived as a lie. At the very least, inconsistencies between verbal and nonverbal communication can result in confusion.

The following are some of the components of body language:

Eye Contact: Eye contact is considered one of the most important aspects of non-verbal communication. Steady eye contact often indicates attention to the person one is in conversation with, as well as a willingness and sincerity to connect. The lack of eye contact can be viewed as defensiveness, nervousness and or social withdrawal. Many say that our eyes are the “windows to our soul”, and that one can tell if an individual is happy, sad, or angry simply by looking at their eyes.

Facial Expression: It is believed that there are universal facial expressions for different emotions, most of which have an evolutionary basis. For example, anger is often indicated by sharp stares, crunched eyebrows and the baring of teeth. Sadness, on the other hand, can be denoted by teary eyes and drooping lips. Note though that the expression and perception of emotions tend to vary from culture to culture.

Posture: The way we sit down, stand up or even walk can also communicate. For example, slumping in a chair is often considered as a sign of inattention and or disrespect. Walking with one’s head and shoulders down can be interpreted as a sign of nervousness or low self-esteem. Withdrawing to a fetal position

can also be indicative of fear and or depression. The puffing of one’s chest has been traditionally interpreted as pride.

Specific Movements: There are specific movements that have traditionally been associated with certain messages. For example, nodding is generally a sign of assent or agreement. Raising clenched hands are interpreted as a sign of angry challenge. Stomping our feet can be an indication of frustration.

Physical Contact: The way we physically interact with other people is also a part of body language. Shaking of hands, hugging, slapping, punching are forms of communication. The same can be said about our physical closeness and distance with another person. Standing too close to a person can be considered as an invasion of boundaries, while standing too far from a person can be construed as avoidance.

The Signals You Send to Others



Generally, our non-verbal communication is something that we do unconsciously. It can be influenced by many things, including past habits, life experiences, personal models, culture and hidden thoughts and feelings. Because body language is often outside of awareness, most have no idea what it is exactly that they are communicating to other people.

To take control of the signals that we send to others, it's important that we become much more deliberate and purposive in communicating non-verbally.

The following are some tips and techniques you can follow to be able to use body language effectively.

Increase your awareness of your body language. Try to get more information about what you communicate non-verbally, so that you will know what to change and what to retain. Ways you can do this include: watching a videotape of yourself, studying yourself in front of a mirror, and getting feedback from peers and friends.

Know how certain behaviors are typically interpreted. Interpreting body language can be very subjective. There are, however, typical interpretations to specific body language. Increasing awareness of what body language is often associated with what interpretation, can help a person avoid body language incongruent with the message they want to send; as well as deliberately practice the body language congruent with their message.

Practice! Practice! Practice! Body language is a skill. Initially, using body language that is congruent with the message that we want to communicate will feel unnatural. But just keep on working on it. Soon, it'll be second nature to you!

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It



Non-verbal communication also includes the way we deliver information. A simple change in tone and inflection can change the meaning of statements. It is important then, to be aware of the way we speak, so that we can

communicate more effectively.

The following are aspects of “how we say things” that we should take note of:

Tone of Voice: Voice intonation refers to the use of changing pitch in order to convey a message. The same message, for example, can be delivered using a rising intonation, a dipping intonation, or a falling intonation. Changes in tone can help inject emotions into messages; messages can be upbeat or depressing depending on the speaker's tone. Changes in tone can also help identify what is the purpose of a sentence. There are intonations that better fit a question, and intonations that better fit a declarative sentence.

Stress and Emphasis: Changing which words or syllables you put emphasis on can change its meaning. For example, consider the differences among these three statements below. The italicized word represents where the emphasis is.

You mean *he* disobeyed his mother? ○ You mean he *disobeyed* his mother?

You mean he disobeyed *his mother*?

Pace and Rhythm: The speed of speech, as well as the appropriate use of pauses can change the meaning of words spoken, and affect the clarity and effectiveness of a communication. For instance, people who speak too fast can be difficult to talk to --- a listener might feel too pressured to catch everything that they have to say! On the other hand, a person who speaks too slowly can bore their listener.

Volume: How softly and how loudly you speak also matters in communication. Ideally, one should generally speak in a moderate volume while in the company of others; a too soft a voice can communicate nervousness or lack of assertiveness, while a loud voice can communicate anger and aggression. A person should also be flexible, able to whisper or shout when it's appropriate to do so.

Pronunciation and Enunciation. How well a message comes across is influenced by pronunciation and enunciation. Pronunciation refers to speaking a word in a way that's generally accepted or understood, while enunciation is the act of speaking clearly and concisely. Developing one's skills in pronunciation and enunciation ensures that one is accurately understood. Note that accents can cause varieties in what is considered as acceptable pronunciation.



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