



learningmaterials
Body Language

Learning Materials

These materials supplement and expand upon the skills and principles delivered in the training.

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BODY LANGUAGE; NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

“As the tongue speaketh to the ear, the hand speaketh to the eye.” Francis Bacon

You cannot fail to communicate with your body. Think about it. Standing in the corner of a room on your own, arms folded, looking out of the window at something apparently fascinating elsewhere, says as much about you as does communicating with ease and confidence in the middle of the room.

Being animated and enthusiastic is infectious to those around you; others will be happy to be in your company and be buoyed by your positive attitude to life. In the broader picture you will be more likely to be invited to dinner and other social functions because we all like those who add to the social dynamic at our functions. However, if your body language conveys to others that you are bored, disinterested and unenthusiastic, you are unlikely to find yourself making a new contact.

Mirroring is a way of matching your non-verbal communication to that of another person to help create better rapport and understanding. We do this automatically in many social and business situations. Have a look around at the next gathering you are at and look at those who mirror one another's body language, and those who do not. Which conversations appear to be going better?

However, it is important to know that this is not about copying others, which would drive everyone nuts, but about being aware of the natural ways in which we can get in tune with those with whom we are communicating.

On the following pages are some key principles in relation to:

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Posture And Gesture

Make Eye Contact And Smile

The Handshake And The Kiss

The Space Bubble

Is Touching Taboo?

Posture And Gesture

“I have everything I had twenty years ago - except that now it’s all lower.”

Gypsy Rose Lee

We are all aware of the aspects of body language that apparently illustrate to people that we are lying: fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, scratching your nose, rubbing your ear and the like. But here’s the important thing to note: you may actually be telling the truth, but if you do not look as if you are, you may not be believed anyway. So it is important not only to listen, but to look as if you are listening. And it is important not only to be truthful, but also to look as if you are telling the truth.

Stand straight and adopt alert, confident postures. It is hugely important, particularly when you first walk into a room, that you create the right impression about yourself from the outset. Think back to the last event you were at and try to remember what the most immediately impressive individuals were like? They stood tall, no matter their height and created an energy that others responded to in a positive way.

If you are at a meeting, or an event such as a networking lunch, where the majority of the time you are seated, the same rule applies: make sure that you do not slouch in your chair, but again adopt an upright posture.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to ensure that when you are speaking to someone they know that they are being listened to. Face them with an open body posture and, if appropriate, lean towards them - but always be aware of their personal space.

Psychologists have studied body language long and hard, and have come to some conclusions that are now common currency: scratching your ear, rubbing your nose or not making eye contact means you are lying; closed body posture, arms folded, legs crossed and away from your subject indicates boredom; shuffling feet or tapping a pencil on the table indicates impatience etc. All of these might be true to a certain extent, so it is important that you do your best not to exhibit any annoying mannerisms.

You may simply need to scratch your nose, find it comfortable to have your legs crossed or be in the habit of tapping your fork at the lunch table but others may subconsciously feel that you are not happy with their company.

Use positive, receptive and open gestures. Even if the other person is closed initially, you can lead them out into the light by using the body language and active listening techniques mentioned earlier.

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Make Eye Contact And Smile

“Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.” Mark Twain.

Many people fail to make adequate, proper eye contact, with some even avoiding eye contact as much as possible. Making eye contact is one of the most effective ways of getting someone's attention to initiate a conversation, yet many people are intimidated by the very thought.

You must make eye contact when in conversation: for about 80% of the time you should be looking either into the eyes of the other person, or in the vicinity of their eyes and face.

When making a public presentation, or talking to a group even in a more informal setting, looking at individuals for up to 3 to 6 seconds before breaking off contact is appropriate.

Practise your eye contact and concentrate on making effective eye contact next time you are in conversation with someone. You will find this will also positively affect your ability to actively listen.

Please smile. It is important. Try it tomorrow morning when going into the local shop for your paper, or at lunchtime when buying your sandwiches. Most people will smile back and before you know it you have struck up a conversation. Work on your smile in the mirror if you are worried that it looks a bit put on, and practise it. When meeting someone new shake their hand, introduce yourself, then look them in the eyes and give them a big natural smile, one that they believe is just for them (because it is).

The Handshake And The Kiss

“Holding hands at midnight ‘Neath a starry sky; Nice work if you can get it and you can get it if you try.” Ira Gershwin

Do you shake hands? Should you shake hands? Do you always shake hands? What if you meet a boy-scout and he proffers his left hand, since he will have his staff in his right? What if you offer your hand and the other person refuses to respond? What if you offer your hand and the other person slaps you on the face with a leather glove and challenges you to a duel? You would have to be fairly insecure if you thought that the last one was likely to happen, would you not? Well, it is probably just as likely to happen as any of the others, so get into the habit of offering your hand to people when you meet them and making eye contact and smiling at the same time.

Once you are in the habit of shaking hands you will be confident enough to know when to do it and when not to, and not bother too much either way. If you are self-conscious and wondering whether or not to shake hands you are more likely to blow it.

It is also important that your hand-shake is not too limp, too firm, too short or too long ...or even too damp! How do you do it? Clasp hands - web to web - and move in an up and down motion two or three times. Look the person in the eye, smile and do your introduction (that would be your name and maybe one or two other wee nuggets to set things off).

And if it is not bad enough that we can get a bit confused about shaking hands, what about the sometimes one, often two or even three small kisses on the cheek?

The same principles hold true for the kiss as for the handshake: get into the habit of doing it when it is appropriate and you will then be less self-conscious. Being less self-conscious you will be more relaxed about the whole thing. It is, however, an act that is fraught with just a little more difficulty than the simple handshake. There is a slightly higher - though statistically minute - chance of being challenged to a duel when attempting the kiss, either from the person you are trying to kiss, or their partner.

Bottom line? There is no need to do it: a handshake is just fine. But when you meet a serial kisser just go with the flow and join in.

What if you really do not want to be kissed? How can it be avoided? Are you really desperate not to be air-pecked by this person? You could just put up with it, but if you are very keen to defend your position, use your arm (by locking your elbow) when shaking hands to keep the person out of your intimate zone.

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The Space Bubble

“Never rub bottoms with a porcupine.” Jane Philbin

Like everything else here, you can work on this. Think of someone you know who seems to ‘own’ a fair amount of personal space when in a group and look at the way they use their body, gestures, voice and mannerisms to control that space. And circumstances dictate how personal space is defined, for instance, the Intimate Zone is between 15 and 50 centimetres - from the width of a letter to the length of a tabloid newspaper. Only partners, relatives and very close friends get into this one.

Other definitions are:

Up Close and Personal: Between about 50 cm and 1 metre is the distance for social functions of both a business and personal nature.

Dancing With a Stranger: 1 metre to 3 metres is the distance we keep from strangers or those we do not know well.

Public Persona: Over 3 or 4 metres is the comfortable distance if we are making an oral presentation to a group.

Is Touching Taboo?

“A most moving and pulse-stirring honor - the heartfelt grope of the hand, and the welcome that does not descend from the pale, gray matter of the brain but rushes up with the red blood of the heart.” Mark Twain

Bearing in mind the guidelines above about personal space, it would seem that touching - in most business situations - is taboo. In many situations the norm will be a handshake or a kiss or two, followed by a retreat to the appropriate distance, so although you do have to be careful not to cause offence, it is possible to enter the personal space of the person you are talking to appropriately and effectively.

However, as with the kiss and the hand shake, you must first be comfortable with it yourself. It should not be affected or mechanical or over-rehearsed but rather as natural as possible. An example would be touching the hand or lower or upper arm of someone you are in rapport with to emphasise a point, allied to leaning towards them a little. Touching someone in the middle or upper back as you escort them through to another room may also be appropriate if it is done naturally and with integrity.

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