

## **The Impact of Nonverbal Communication**

*by Debra Hamilton*

Actions speak louder than words. This statement is more than a cliché, it's a fact. We are always communicating. Our smile, gestures, voice, and handshake all send out messages to those around us.

Nonverbal cues indicate what is *really* being said. In fact, repeated studies show that more than 90% of your message's meaning is transmitted nonverbally. Even as we sit in silence, we are sending messages. There is no such thing as "not communicating."

The big question is: Are you aware or clueless? How are you perceived in your everyday communication—meetings, one-on-one conversations, presentations? Does your nonverbal communication enhance your message or detract from it?

### **Vocal Cues to Be Aware of**

**Volume.** Generally speaking, listeners prefer a loud voice to a soft one. However, both can be useful. A loud voice is authoritative and attention getting. A soft voice can reflect calm self-assurance. Either, however, can become a distraction if used excessively or with the wrong intent.

**Pace.** Listeners prefer a slightly faster pace to a slower pace. However, rapid speech can signal nervousness, impatience, and insecurity. Slower speech, on the other hand, is useful for making an important point. Speakers who vary their pace and use pauses keep their listeners more engaged.

**Tone.** Tone helps a speaker convey interest and enthusiasm. Speakers who vary their tone in combination with complementary body language send a message of emotional substance. A flat tone can indicate boredom, anger, or apprehension.

**Mumbling.** Mumbling often indicates a lack of confidence. A speaker who mumbles chronically should practice enunciation every day and in combination with effective volume, pace, and tone.

**How to be aware.** Record your voice on a recording device, play it back, and look for patterns or extremes. When speaking, examine your voice along with your body language to see how they match up.

### **The Impact of Body Language**

**Nervousness.** Common signs of nervousness include: reduced eye contact, tense body posture, rocking, throat clearing, hand wringing, and slumped shoulders. All speakers

experience some anxiety; but repetitive nervous behaviors will cause listeners to disengage.

**Hostility or defensiveness.** Common signs of defensiveness include: crossed arms, hands on hips, finger pointing, rigid posture, clenched fists, and eye rolling. When displayed excessively, these behaviors can escalate into a conflict and damage credibility.

**How to be aware.** Become aware of your body language behaviors that are repetitive and focus on one behavior change at a time. Record yourself on video giving a practice presentation, play it back, and look for patterns or extremes. Ask a colleague or spouse to observe you and provide feedback.

Be mindful of your nonverbal communication. Increased awareness is the foundation for becoming a confident credible communicator.

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