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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Introduction

An understanding of nonverbal communication is vital when you are negotiating, and using positive nonverbal communication yourself will make you a better negotiator.

There are four key elements to nonverbal communication - posture, facial expression, tone of voice and limb position. Of these, the tone of voice is most easily disguised and you should be wary of making judgments based on this element alone.

While the other side are speaking, reassure them by using positive body language - make a lot of eye contact, smile, nod in agreement with their major points and generally act as though you are persuaded by their arguments. This tends to draw the other side out by making them feel that you are easier to negotiate with.

When they have come to the end of their prepared remarks, keep quiet and maintain an attentive pose. They may then begin to improvise - providing even more information to the intelligent listener.

Body language should be seen as a two edged sword, and when you are opening you should be aware that the other side may use it to encourage you to say more than you intended.

Mirroring

In any intimate communication there is a natural tendency to mirror the body position of the person you are talking to, and this behavior tends to result in a more relaxed and agreeable atmosphere. You can put the other side at ease by being aware of this and making a positive but subtle effort to mirror their posture - but don't overdo it.

If you are negotiating as part of a team then it is important to keep everyone on your side aware of the subtle messages they may be sending out. An individual's facial expression, tone of voice, body posture and movement often convey a world of detail about what they are thinking, feeling and planning.

It is important to ensure that all of your team understand the implications of nonverbal communication. The use of positive body language can reassure the other side and may encourage them to improvise - revealing valuable information.

Nonverbal Communication – When Presenting

You need to be aware of your nonverbal communication from the moment you stand up until your presentation is completed. The importance of positive eye contact and the correct use of posture and hand movement to accompany your presentation cannot be overstated.

As audience analysis shows nonverbal communication is a very important part of any presentation. This screen explains aspects of nonverbal communication as it applies in western society. Members of your audience will analyze your body language, even if they are unaware of this at the conscious level. A brilliantly prepared presentation delivered in an interesting voice will fall well short of the mark if accompanied by negative, intrusive or hostile nonverbal communication.

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You will probably be aware of the concept of personal space - that area around an individual into which other people should not venture uninvited. Audiences too are very conscious of this space and when presenting you should not stand within 10 feet of the audience. This distance is known as the public zone and if you violate it you are likely to antagonize those affected. This distance also creates an effective stage area in which you, the presenter, can perform.

Once you are positioned in the correct zone - this will be further away the larger the audience, there are four main aspects of nonverbal communication that you should consider; what to do with your eyes, what your facial expressions indicate, the positioning and movement of your body and limbs, and your hand gestures.

Body and Limb Movement

The way that you use your body and limbs will also have a major influence on how your audience perceives you. When presenting you will normally be standing, and an ideal stance is with your feet close together and your weight evenly distributed between them. It is important not to grow roots - don't stand in one position, but try to inject movement as you speak. This helps to add a natural animation to your presentation as the audience will have to adjust their gaze to follow you rather than stay looking at a fixed position. By developing a practiced way of moving you can add a confident and professional air to your presentation style. Precisely how you choose to move is a personal thing - but try to develop and rehearse your style so that you end up moving without conscious effort.

Whilst it is a good thing to be animated don't walk around too much or the audience will find it distracting and annoying. One of the best tactics is to use the main features of your presentation as cues for movement, until you have developed this skill it may be worth annotating your cue cards with movement cues or symbols. When conversing socially you probably don't think consciously about what you are doing with your arms, they are just there, moving in support of what you are saying. Somehow in a formal presentation you are constantly aware of them, hanging awkwardly from your shoulders, always seeming to be in the way.

The key point about arms is to ignore them - move them back into your subconscious so that they can support what you are saying in a natural way. That said, there is one movement that you should develop when presenting which will display confidence and openness. This involves moving your arms away from your body and showing open palms to your audience.

Eye Contact

Eye contact with the audience is an essential part of any presentation. Without it the audience will feel remote from the presenter and are unlikely to relate to them or their message in a meaningful way. Not many presenters realize how important eye contact is, or how sensitive people are to it. Eye contact should be a positive form of nonverbal communication, but if it is not used correctly it can easily become negative.

As well as understanding how to make positive eye contact with an individual it is also important to ensure that your gaze encompasses your whole audience - including those at the back and the sides. Try to avoid holding eye contact only with audience members who appear enthusiastic and interested. Whilst you may find it more difficult to engage members of the audience who appear neutral, it is important to try to involve them.

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Your Posture and Stance

There are further aspects of posture that you should be aware of - as they can easily communicate subconscious messages, some of which you will want to avoid:

The forward sloping stance indicates a wish to dominate other people, often it is accompanied by an over-stressed point. The presenter may be attempting to impose a concept or point of view on their audience. This is made worse by aggressive or intrusive behaviour - such as entering the public zone or the use of hostile gestures.

A bent posture is indicative of a person who is saying something without conviction. Saying one thing whilst meaning another - such as a salesperson giving an exaggerated sales pitch or a customer who wants to say no but has been placed in an awkward position.

The upright posture demonstrates adult, assertive behavior with no hidden meaning or manipulations in the communication. This stance indicates that the person has conviction and confidence in what they are saying. This is the posture you should practice and use when presenting

This tutorial is an excerpt from the GetAhead in Business Presentations course.

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