

THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.” – Peter F. Drucker

Nonverbal communication describes the process of shared cues between people, which goes hand-in-hand with public speaking. This can include eye contact, frequency of glances, blink rate, gestures, facial expressions, postures, and more.

The presentation is, perhaps, the one mode of communication that has proved relevant through every technological innovation. Our decks get more glamorous, but it’s still just you on stage, in front of an audience. Nonverbal signals can increase trust, clarity, and add interest to your presentation when yielded properly. Learning how to become more sensitive to body language and nonverbal cues will make you the best presenter you can be.

The Five Nonverbal Abilities

How is it that non-verbal communication is the element of the in-person presentation that has caused it to be the default response when responses matter most: inaugural addresses, States of the Union, getting big accounts, keeping big accounts—the list goes on and on. Perhaps because this form of communication shares so much more than dialogue. According to the Edward G. Wertheim, author of *The Importance of Effective Communication*, there are five main effects that nonverbal communication can have:

1. **Repetition** – It can reinforce what is already been said
2. **Contradiction** – It can contradict the message and make the speaker seem untruthful
3. **Substitution** – It can take the place of words
4. **Complementing** – It can complement a verbal message, for instance, a pat on the back
5. **Accenting** – They can underline a certain point in the message

Strengthen Eye Contact

Be Presentable

Let your appearance speak for you. Don't allow sloppy dress, haphazard hair, or distracting jewelry drown out your message. According to a study published in Evolution and Human Behavior journal in 2011, people gained cooperation from others, received job recommendations, gained a higher salary, and received larger contributions for charity when they wore perceived high-status clothing.

Work on It

As you practice your presentation, film yourself. What do your facial expressions communicate? Happiness, fear, sadness, surprise, or boredom? Be mindful of your posture as well, ensuring that you don't have the slump of an uninterested presenter. Don't forget to examine your gestures. Does the way that you point, wave, or flail your hands distract from the message, or enhance your points? Try to film yourself for more than one practice to see where nonverbal patterns emerge, and where you can strengthen your physical delivery. Also consider rating yourself on a scale of 1-5 in the following areas:

Eye Contact

Facial Expression

Tone of Voice

Posture and Gesture

Take a Moment

“60% of all human communication is nonverbal body language; 30% is your tone, so that means 90% of what you're saying ain't coming out of your mouth.”
– Alex “Hitch” Hitchens

We tend to think of presentations as two elements combined: what is shown, and what is said. However, it's much more than that. Have you ever considered how much you're saying without speaking? The truth is we still fundamentally believe the echoed words of yesterday's grizzled businessmen: “I want him to lie to my face!” Physical presence is truth, or we're inclined to think so. The

importance of non-verbal communication, then, is to provide the content of your presentation with that elusive element of credibility and expertise that, printed and mailed to your intended audience, would be lost in translation. Make sure what you're not saying is as poignant as what you are.