

# NonVerbal Communication

## eREPORT

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By **Dr. Tony Alessandra**

# NonVerbal Communication

## *Body Language and Vocal Intonation*

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Suppose that you have called one of your employees into your office. He is not aware that you intend to talk to him about a discipline problem you recently discovered. You are determined to get to the bottom of this problem here and now. The employee enters your office, and you cordially ask him to have a seat. As you open the conversation on a social note, your employee is looking at you with his head slightly tilted, legs and arms uncrossed, and suit jacket unbuttoned. He is leaning slightly forward in his chair with his hands open and relaxed.

Midway through a difficult discussion, you notice that the employee's arms and legs are tightly crossed. His body seems rigid, his lips are pursed, and his fists are clenched. He is also maintaining little eye contact. As he tells you his side of the story, he still fails to maintain eye contact and even resists your glances. During his end of the conversation, he seems to be squinting, rubbing his nose, and casually covering his mouth with his hands. As you listen, you occasionally peer over the rims of your glasses at him, sometimes giving him sideways glances and intermittently raising an eyebrow. Toward the end of the conversation, you tell your employee that you intend to keep an open mind about the situation and will objectively look into the matter further.

As the employee is leaving your office, you lean back in your chair with your fingers laced behind your head and your feet on the desk. You have a funny feeling that something else went on during the conversation in addition to the words that were spoken, but you can't put your finger on it. You didn't believe a word he said because of the way he was acting, but you didn't want to let on to him that you were suspicious. That's why you told him that you would keep an open mind and be objective in this matter.

Little do you realize that both you and the employee were openly communicating with each other, not through words, but through body language. Your body movements,

facial expressions, and gestures revealed much more about your attitudes and emotional state than your words. If you, the manager, only knew how to read body language, your discussion with the employee might have gone in an entirely different direction, and the problem could have been resolved on the spot.

In this situation you read the employee's body language — crossed legs, rigid body, pursed lips, clenched fists, little eye contact, nervous gestures — as an attempt to withhold information or actually distort the information given. The employee read your nonverbal responses — peering over glasses, sideways glances, and raised eyebrows — as distrust. Your body language made him nervous and he started withdrawing. His body language makes you think he isn't telling the truth and you start distrusting him.

Body language is certainly not a new phenomenon. People have known about it and have used it since the beginning of time. Before people developed language as a communication tool, they used body language to make their needs and desires known to other people. Also known as kinesics, body language describes human interaction excluding the use of written and spoken words. This broad definition encompasses everything from the subtlest raising of an eyebrow to the precise movements of the sophisticated sign language used by the deaf.

Some nonverbal gestures are symbols understood by a great majority of the world. The chair at the head of the table has long been reserved for the leader of the group. More recently, this position of honor has also been extended to the host of the table. It is a custom that was honored as far back as the time of King Arthur, when the round table was developed as an attempt to administer democracy by eliminating the appearance of having one leader. Another universal gesture is raising the hands above the head, which has long symbolized surrender and submission.

Some gestures are even more expressive than words. Conjure up the image of a person slapping his forehead. This may be accompanied by an audible groan. Don't you already know that he has remembered something he was supposed to do? Implicit in this gesture is a rebuke to himself for his oversight.

Other well-known gestures are saluting, tipping one's hat, shaking hands, shrugging shoulders, waving goodbye, form-

ing an “O” with thumb and forefinger, and blowing a kiss. Nonverbal communication in the form of body language translates almost instantaneously. Research has substantiated that even when exposure to a situation is reduced to 1/24 of a second (the time it takes to show a single frame of film), people often grasp what it means. At 3/24 of a second, comprehension goes up dramatically, and there is increased understanding up to slightly more than one second of exposure.

Ability to understand body language is apparently not related to IQ, the ability to take tests, or the grades one makes in school. Practice tends to improve the ability to understand body language. People tested for body language comprehension generally score higher on second and subsequent tests than on their first tries.

We have a plethora of courses and seminars that teach us how to write and speak better, but there are relatively few available in the study of nonverbal communications and body language. This section will give you a guide to developing a more thorough understanding of nonverbal communication techniques.

Sigmund Freud, an early believer in the utility of body language, distrusted the spoken word and based much of his work on the assumption that words hide more than they reveal. Freud believed, as do many researchers, that although we cannot rely on the truth of words, nonverbal behavior often does project truth.

Through kinesic behavior, people express their conscious and subconscious emotions, desires, and attitudes. Body language, which is stimulated by a subconscious need to express inner feelings, is more reliable than verbal communication and may even contradict verbal expressions. Body language is an outlet for your feelings and can function as a lie detector to aid a watchful observer in interpreting your words. To the observant, our body language communicates our sincerity and commitment.

In organizations, the communication of ideas is of primary importance. Unless we understand nonverbal body language, we are losing at least 50 percent of the message that is being communicated. By increasing your awareness of kinesic behavior, you can read the emotions and attitudes of fellow employees, supervisors, customers, and others you interact with inside and outside your organization. As a result, you will have a greater feeling for and awareness of all your interper-

sonal transactions. This increased rapport with, and understanding of, others leads to increased trust and productivity.

The study of body language can also help improve others’ understanding of you. The better you are able to transmit messages so that others receive them as they were intended, the more effective you will be. Therefore, be acutely aware of the nonverbal messages you are projecting. You can increase tension and decrease trust simply by projecting negative body language or by lacking sensitivity in observing the nonverbal communication of others. The “bad vibes” that result can be disastrous to present and future relationships.

## Language Gestures

Body language and nonverbal communication is transmitted through the eyes, face, hands, arms, legs, and posture (sitting and walking). You can tell a great deal about others, and they about you, simply by noting body gestures. However, each individual, isolated gesture is like a word in a sentence; it is difficult and dangerous to interpret in and of itself. As individual words have definitions, individual gestures have some meaning. Unless it is a one-word sentence, it takes more than one to provide full meaning. Therefore, consider the gesture in light of everything else that is going on around you. When individual gestures are put together in clusters, they give a more complete and exact meaning of what the other person is feeling and thinking. Gesture clusters are the combined messages transmitted by the eyes, face, hands, arms, legs, and postures. But, before we look at the attitudes and meanings projected by gesture clusters, we need to look at the each individual nonverbal transmitter.

## The Eyes

The eyes, known as the windows of the soul, are excellent indicators of a person’s feelings. The expressions “shifty eyes,” “beady eyes,” and “look of steel” demonstrate the awareness people have for this area of the body. It is a long-held belief that the honest person has a tendency to look you straight in the eye when speaking. Recent work in this area has shown that there is some scientific basis for this belief. It has been discovered that speakers who were rated as “sincere” looked at their audience an average of three times longer than those speakers who were rated as “insincere.”

People avoid eye contact with another person when an uncomfortable question is asked. Be aware of this and steer clear of topics that result in the avoidance of eye

contact. Try to reduce tension and build trust rather than increase the tension.

Eye gestures are often easily interpreted. The raising of one eyebrow shows disbelief, whereas two eyebrows raised shows surprise. Winking can be flirtatious or sometimes indicative of agreement, especially when accompanied by a nod or smile. Be sensitive to the body language of an employee who looks upward with a fixed expression while blinking rapidly. Chances are that what you are talking about is being seriously considered by the employee. In fact, a favorable decision may have already been made on the big issue, and the employee may simply be meditating on the details. Patience on your part is needed here. Refrain from further intense discussion until the employee's thought process is complete.

Some interesting work has been done with eye direction. People look either to the right or to the left, depending on what thoughts dominate their mental activity. Most people are classified as right lookers or left lookers. Left lookers are found to be more emotional, subjective, and suggestible; whereas right lookers are more influenced by logic and precision.

## The Face

The face is one of the most reliable indicators of a person's attitudes, emotions, and feelings. Facial expressions sometimes betray emotions and states of mind. By analyzing facial expressions, interpersonal attitudes can be discerned and feedback obtained. "You can read his face like an open book" is a common statement used to describe a person whose facial expressions are demonstrative. Sometimes facial expressions are guarded in order not to betray a position prematurely by expressing a nonverbal opinion. The term poker face describes an attempt to keep others from knowing your true emotions. Common facial gestures are frowns (unhappiness/anger), smiles (happiness), sneers (dislike/disgust), clinched jaws (tension/anger), and pouting lips (sadness).

## The Hands

Tightly clenched hands or wringing hands usually indicate that the person is experiencing undue pressure. This person will usually be difficult to relate to, as he is highly tense and in strong disagreement with you. "Steepling," joining the fingertips together and forming what might be described as a church steeple, indicates smugness and great self-confidence. Superiority and authority are usually

indicated when you are standing and joining your hands together behind your back.

A number of attitudes and emotions can be conveyed by what a person does with his hands around the face or head. For example, rubbing gently behind or beside the ear with the index finger usually shows signs of doubt. Casually rubbing the eye with one finger also usually means the other person is uncertain about what you are saying. Of course, it may also just be that the other person has an itch or a "sleeper" in the eye. Rubbing the back of the head or palming the nape of the neck typically indicates frustration with the other person or the situation. Leaning back with both hands supporting the head usually indicates a feeling of confidence or superiority. Cupping one or both hands over the mouth, especially when talking, may well indicate that the person is trying to hide something. Boredom is often communicated by placing your head in your open palm and dropping your chin in a nodding manner while allowing your eyelids to droop. Putting your hand to your cheek or stroking your chin generally portrays thinking, interest, or consideration. On the other hand, pinching the bridge of your nose with your eyes closed, or placing your forefinger near your nose with your chin resting in the palm of your hand and your fingers bent across the chin or below the mouth most often shows that critical evaluation is taking place.

## The Arms and Legs

Crossed arms tend to signal defensiveness. They act as a protective guard against an anticipated attack or a fixed position from which the other person would rather not move. Conversely, arms open and extended toward you generally indicate openness and acceptance.

Crossed legs tend to signal disagreement. People who tightly cross their legs seem to be saying that they disagree with what you are saying or doing. If people have tightly crossed legs and tightly crossed arms, their inner attitude is usually one of extreme negativity toward what is going on around them. As long as they are in this position, it is unlikely you will get their full agreement to what you are saying or doing.

## Posture: Sitting and Walking

Sitting with a leg over the arm of a chair usually signals an uncooperative attitude. Sitting with the chair back facing forward and straddling the seat with your arms on the chair back tends to express a dominant, superior attitude.



Sitting with your legs crossed and the elevated foot moving in a slight circular motion indicates boredom or impatience. Sitting on the edge of the chair and leaning slightly forward usually projects interest and involvement.

Generally, people who walk fast and swing their arms freely tend to know what they want and to go after it. People who walk with their shoulders hunched and hands in their pockets tend to be secretive and critical. They don't seem to like much of what is going on around them. Dejected people usually scuffle along with their hands in their pockets, heads down, and shoulders hunched over. People who are preoccupied or thinking usually walk with their heads down, hands clasped behind their backs, and a very slow pace.

## Interpreting Gesture Clusters

Certain combinations of gestures are especially reliable indicators of a person's true feelings. These combinations are called gesture clusters. Each body language gesture is dependent on others, so analysis of a person's body language is based on a series of signals to ensure that the body language is clearly and accurately understood. Interpreting gesture clusters ensures a more meaningful analysis of the person's state of mind if the individual gestures that make up the cluster are congruent. In other words, all the individual gestures fit together to project a common, unified message. When they do not, you are faced with a case of incongruity. A good example of incongruity is the nervous laugh. A laugh traditionally signals amusement and relaxation. Yet when it sounds strained or nervous, and when the entire body shifts as though it were trying to escape an unpleasant situation, you know that laugh does not mean amusement or relaxation. The laughter is probably there to try to cover up discomfort and possibly fear. So, in reading body language, make sure that you focus on gesture clusters and congruency. Remember that body language may augment, emphasize, contradict, or be totally unrelated to the words that someone is speaking. Therefore, reading body language is a continuous process of analysis. Let's look at some of the more common gesture clusters and their associated meanings.

### Openness

Several gestures indicate openness and sincerity, such as open hands, unbuttoned coat or collar, removing coat or jacket, moving closer together, leaning slightly forward in the chair, and uncrossed arms and legs. When people are proud of what they've done, they usually show their hands quite openly. When they are not, they often put their hands

in their pockets or behind their backs. Carefully watch the hands of a child the next time one is trying to hide something. When people take their coats off, unbutton their collars, or extend their arms toward you; they are generally beginning to feel comfortable in your presence. These are all positive signs.

## Defensiveness

People who are defensive usually have a rigid body, arms or legs tightly crossed, eyes glancing sideways or darting occasionally, minimal eye contact, lips pursed, fists clenched, and a downcast head. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a person with arms tightly crossed over his chest? A baseball umpire, right? Picture the manager rushing out of the dugout, arms swinging or stuck in his back pockets. As the manager approaches, the umpire crosses his arms. He has already nonverbally signaled his intention to defend his decision. As part of this cluster, the umpire may curtly turn his back on the manager, saying nonverbally, "You've talked enough." Arm-gripping and tightly clenched fists are more extreme forms of the crossed-arm gesture. Especially watch for tightly clenched fists. They show that the other person is really turned off.

When someone puts his leg over the arm of a chair, it might seem to suggest relaxation and openness. It does not. Research has shown that when this happens, that person is dropping out of the conversation. You can't expect much more participation from this person unless you can reverse his position. Straddling a chair again might look informal and open, but it is not. It is domineering. The person has raised his defenses. Quite often, in work situations the boss will do this to an employee. It is defensive, and you won't get anywhere dealing with a person in this posture.

## Evaluation

Evaluation gestures say that the other person is being thoughtful or is considering what you are saying – sometimes in a friendly way, sometimes unfriendly. Typical evaluation gestures include the tilted head, hand to cheek, leaning forward, and chin stroking. Have you ever seen Auguste Rodin's famous statue *The Thinker*? Isn't this the model of a person deep in thought? In addition to the hand-to-cheek gesture, a person who tilts his head and leans slightly forward is usually considering what you are saying. A gesture indicating serious contemplation of what is being said is the chin-stroking gesture. Many say that this gesture signifies a wise person making a judgment.

Sometimes evaluation gestures take on a critical aspect. In this posture, the body is usually more drawn back. The hand is to the face, but the chin is in the palm of the hand with one finger going up the cheek and the other fingers positioned below the mouth. This is generally an unfavorable gesture. The typical delaying gesture to give a person more time to evaluate the situation is removing one's glasses and putting the earpiece of the frame in the mouth. People who smoke cigarettes sometimes light one to gain time. However, the classic stall gesture is pipe smoking. With little effort, this can be turned into a ritual of delay. The pipe has to be filled, cleaned, tapped, and lighted. Pipe smokers generally give the impression that they are more patient and moderate than cigarette smokers, who sometimes look like sprinters as they fish for a cigarette. If you are dealing with someone who is going through these stalling evaluation rituals, it is usually a good idea to let the person have the time needed to think things through. A person who pinches the bridge of his nose, closes his eyes, and slumps his head down slightly is expressing self-conflict. He is probably trying to decide if he is in a bad situation or not. Don't try to reason him out of it. Give him time. A final negative evaluation gesture is a person's dropping his eyeglasses to the lower bridge of the nose and peering over them. This gesture usually causes a negative emotional reaction in other people. Those on the receiving end feel that they are being closely scrutinized and looked down upon. Remember though that sometimes this gesture is made unintentionally by people who have ill-fitting glasses or granny glasses for reading.

### **Suspicion, Secrecy, Rejection, and Doubt**

These negative emotions are communicated typically by sideways glances, minimal or no eye contact, shifting the body away from the speaker, and touching or rubbing the nose. When a person won't look at you, it could mean that he is being secretive, has private feelings in opposition to what you are saying, or is hiding something. A sideways glance sometimes registers as suspicion and doubt. It is sometimes called "the cold shoulder." Have you ever tried to help someone cross the street who really preferred to proceed alone? You quickly discovered what the cold shoulder means. The individual may cross the street with you but turn away from you at a forty-five degree angle. It is a gesture of rejection toward your "helping" hand. Shifting your body away from a person who is speaking or sitting so that your feet are pointing toward the door usually means that you wish to end the meeting, conversation, or whatever is going on. Touching or slightly rubbing the nose, as opposed to scratching the nose, may indicate puzzlement, doubt, or concealment.

### **Readiness**

Readiness is related to the goal-oriented high achiever with a concern for getting things done. It communicates dedication to a goal and is usually communicated by placing your hands on your hips or sitting forward at the edge of a chair. The most common of these gestures is hands on hips. Athletes standing on the sidelines waiting to enter a sporting event often take this position. At a business meeting, it is usually assumed by someone who wants and expects other people to follow. A young child takes this position when challenging a parent's authority.

If you were about to sign an agreement you were pleased with, you would sit at the edge of your chair. If you did not like the agreement, you would sit back. Salespeople are usually taught that people sitting on the edge of their seats are usually ready to make a purchase decision. These are positive gestures and are not to be feared. The individual is merely saying nonverbally that he is ready and able to take action. However, be careful when you project these gestures to others. You may give the appearance of being overly anxious.

### **Reassurance**

This is usually conveyed by someone pinching the fleshy part of the hand; picking at fingernails; gently rubbing or caressing some personal object such as a watch, ring, or necklace; or chewing on some object such as a pencil, pen, or paper clip. We usually see these gestures quite vividly when people from the audience participate on a TV program. Many people are afraid of the television camera for numerous reasons. They think it will make them look heavier or older or will reveal some strange idiosyncrasies in their behavior. During the actual videotaping and the subsequent playback of the tape, people make all kinds of gestures to reassure themselves.

### **Frustration**

The next time you watch a football game, pay close attention to what happens after a quarterback fades back and throws a pass that goes in and out of the hands of his teammate. You will probably see the teammate kick the ground, slap the side of his helmet, or even do a double karate chop in the air. These are all frustration gestures of an extreme kind. More common frustration gestures are tightly clenched hands, rubbing the nape of the neck, hand-wringing, and running one's hands through the hair. These are all negative gestures. If someone is doing this in your presence, immediately back away from whatever you

are doing, and give him or her some breathing room. If you don't, the frustration level will keep increasing until it eventually explodes.

## **Confidence, Superiority, and Authority**

These emotions are usually conveyed through relaxation and expansive gestures, such as steepling, feet up or on the desk, leaning back with fingers laced behind the head, and hands together at the back with chin thrust upward.

## **Nervousness**

Clearing one's throat is a typical nervous gesture. Speakers often do this before they talk in front of an audience. Chain-smoking is another gesture of nervousness. Yet when a smoker is extremely nervous, the first thing the person does is put out the cigarette. Covering the mouth while speaking is a nervousness gesture that police officers often see during interrogations. They report that this gesture means anything from self-doubt to lying. Other nervousness gestures include twitching lips or face, fidgeting, shifting weight from one foot to the other, tapping fingers, pacing, jingling pocket change, and whistling.

## **Self-Control**

Gestures such as tightly locking ankles and gripping your wrists behind your back usually mean that you are holding back. Do you do this in a dentist's waiting room? The Army has an old phrase: "Keep your heels locked." It means holding back and not disclosing anything — self-control.

## **Boredom or Impatience**

These unproductive feelings are usually conveyed by the drumming of fingers, cupping the head in the palm of the hand, foot-swinging, brushing or picking at lint, doodling, pointing the body toward an exit, or looking at your watch or the exit.

## **Enthusiasm**

This is an emotion that you love to see in other people and they in you. Enthusiasm is conveyed by a small upper or inward smile, an erect body stance, hands open and arms extended outward, eyes wide and alert, a lively and bouncy walk, and a lively and well-modulated voice.

## **Using Body Language**

The ability to project favorable body postures and to read the body language of others is undoubtedly a special asset in organizations. Here are some of the more com-

mon situations where the ability to read and project body language is especially useful:

## **Employees and Managers**

Body language is especially important between employees and managers because of the closeness of the relationship, the constant need for clear communication, and the need to accomplish objectives by working together. Employees tell managers how their words are being accepted by expressing their emotions and attitudes nonverbally. Managers express their emotions and feelings to employees nonverbally: they show agreement by nodding their head slowly or perhaps bobbing it enthusiastically. Disagreement may be evident when an employee or manager shakes his head or raises his eyebrows to indicate amazement or doubt. Nonverbal gestures transmit the intent of the verbal message before the person has finished speaking.

## **Negotiations**

People who can read body language accurately know when the negotiations are going well and when they are going off track and need to be redirected. They know when people are ready to agree on a deal and how they feel about the deal. If someone loosens his collar, or leans forward with his arms and legs uncrossed, he is displaying openness to what is being discussed in the negotiations. If, however, the other party in a negotiation avoids eye contact and shifts his body away from you, he may have suspicious or secret feelings in opposition to what you are saying.

## **Customer Service**

Many customer service people are receiving specific training in body language in order to do a better job of making the customer happy. The service person who can read body language has a better feeling for the extent of the customer's unhappiness and what it will take to make the customer happy. If a customer service person sees tightly clenched hands, rubbing of the back of the neck, hand-wringing, or running the hands through the hair, he knows that these signs of frustration mean he hasn't succeeded in making his customer happy.

## **Sales**

Top salespeople have always been able to read body language even if they didn't realize that was what they were doing. When a prospect sits on the edge of his seat, it generally indicates a readiness to buy. By closely observing nonverbal clues, a good salesperson knows exactly when

the sale is made even before the prospect has verbally indicated a purchase commitment.

Commitment is often indicated by body language, whether it's commitment to a negotiated compromise, commitment to a new action plan, or commitment to purchase a new product. The most obvious commitment clues are signs of relaxation — unlocking of ankles, palms and arms extending outward toward you, and movements toward the front of the chair — all of which indicate that the person is listening to you and tuning in to your message. If, on the other hand, the person crosses his legs, folds his arms tightly across his chest, and continues to lean back in his chair, you are probably not being effective. He is not being receptive to what you are trying to say, and a change in approach is necessary to win him back.

When someone starts to nod his head with you and copies your gestures, especially to the degree of leaning forward in the chair and balancing on the balls of his feet, you have someone who is really on the same wavelength as you. It is important to recognize these signals early and proceed with the commitment process. Otherwise, you may keep talking beyond the point of appropriateness and eventually bore the person into changing his mind. By carefully reading body language, you will know when to continue along the same line of conversation and when to change the subject, ask for a commitment, or totally end the conversation.

In addition to the other person's body language, what about your own body language? You are sending out signals of your own. Even if the other person is not trained in kinesics, he will still be affected by your body projections. Even though people may not consciously interpret nonverbal signals, they will react to them nonetheless. The worst thing is when your body language and your words are not saying the same thing, which often happens. This can create an enormous credibility problem for you. It may condition others to look for double messages in their conversations with you.

Defensiveness, anger, or frustration can result from your projection of aggressive, dominant, or manipulative body language. Political games and deterioration of trust result from these postures. You can create either beneficial or dangerous emotional climates through body movements. Research shows that people who sit in open, relaxed positions are seen as more persuasive and active and are

better liked than those who sit in a tight, closed manner. Managers who sit in an open, relaxed way are able to affect greater opinion change in their employees than those who do not. These tips can help you maintain or increase cooperation from your co-workers, supervisors, customers, and others.

The relevance of reading body language is by now obvious to you. Studies have demonstrated that people who exhibit “expressionless stimuli” – blank face, aloofness, and no interest – produce low levels of self-expression in others. A simple head nod in agreement seems to offer more feeling of expression, and a combination of head nods and warm smiles encourages others to express their own feelings fully.

As already discussed, body language is an essential part of interpersonal communications. Proficiency with reading and projecting body language is an integral part of your communication success. The mastery of this skill allows you to perceive the needs and desires of others and is also an aid in your own self-expression. However, body language is an inexact science. Gesture clusters are clues to the attitudes and emotions of another person, but they do not provide conclusive evidence. Test and validate your understanding of a person's body language rather than jeopardize your position with that person by making snap decisions. Body language provides the basis for making assumptions that ought to be tested and validated, not for concluding facts. If all else fails, you can always revert to the use of words.

### **Sending Out Your Best Silent Message**

Want to improve upon your first impressions and interactions through body language? *Sending Out Your Best Silent Message* is an eReport that identifies the key elements behind impressions that occur before you even open your mouth. The eReport offers skill-building tips on how to maximize your body language to create a powerful persona – even when you aren't saying anything at all. To purchase, click on the link above.

### **It's How You Say It**

You can hear Sarah speaking. You can't understand her words, but she is speaking rapidly and in a loud tone. Is she:

- a. Excited?
- b. Sleepy?
- c. Angry?
- d. Bored?

You might say that she's either excited or angry but you really don't know for sure. Generally when someone



is bored or sleepy they don't speak rapidly and in a loud tone. But Sarah may naturally speak loud and fast – even when she's bored! Maybe she came from a large family where she had to speak loud and fast to be heard. So what can we tell by a person's tone of voice? A great deal – when we combine the person's vocal tone with her body language and her words. A person's vocal tone is a key communication clue. Taken by itself it might mean nothing or even be misleading but combined with the rest of the communication clues, you can put together a very accurate picture of not only what the speaker is saying but also her intent in saying it. In this section, we take a closer look at the many different emotions people can project through the tone of their voice.

Vocal intonation is a form of nonverbal communication. Vocal intonation is that part of the message's meaning that is lost when speech is written rather than spoken. The verbal and vocal parts of messages do not always communicate the same meaning or feeling. Simple changes in voice qualities can change the meaning or emotion of the same group of words from one thing to another. A good example is an acting teacher who can verbalize the word "oh" eight different ways.

**Oh!** (*Exclamation – Oh! I forgot to mail the check.*)

**Oh!** (*Excitement – Oh! Wow!*)

**Oh?** (*Question – Oh? Is that right?*)

**Oh** (*Passion – Oh! I love opera.*)

**Oh** (*Disgust – Oh, not peas again!*)

**Oh** (*Pain – Oh, my arm hurts.*)

**Oh** (*Disbelief – Oh, yeah?*)

**Oh** (*Boredom – Oh. How interesting.*)

By simple changes in vocal qualities, an actor can convey eight totally separate and unique feelings and emotions to the audience. A simple two-letter word can be used to demonstrate the critical importance of vocal intonation in communications. A lack of emotional sensitivity to voice tones can create communication problems with your co-workers, managers, employees, friends, and family members. When paying attention to voice intonations, concentrate primarily on changes in the voice qualities of the person you are listening to.

## Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal Communication is an eReport that will take your knowledge of vocal intonations to the next level. Today's fast-paced, quickly changing environment puts pressure on all of us to communicate effectively. Reading the messages behind how a person says something is an integral part of understanding ex-

actly what someone is saying – as well as communicating exactly what you want.

## Voice Qualities

Some people naturally speak slowly, loudly, or clearly. When these people change their normal voice qualities, they are communicating something extra to you. It is up to you to know what these vocal qualities are, when they change, and what to do about these changes. The seven major vocal qualities are as follows:

- 1. Resonance - The ability of one's voice to fill space; an intensification and enrichment of the voice tone.**
- 2. Rhythm - The flow, pace, and movement of the voice.**
- 3. Speed - How fast the voice is used.**
- 4. Pitch - The tightening or relaxing of the vocal cords; the highness or lowness of sound.**
- 5. Volume - The degree of loudness or intensity of the voice.**
- 6. Inflection - The changes in pitch or volume of the voice.**
- 7. Clarity - The crisp articulation and enunciation of the words.**

The way someone says something can have a great effect on what meaning is being communicated. An example of this is sarcasm, when the information transmitted vocally has quite a different meaning from what transmitted verbally. This is why it's important for managers to learn what different voice intonations mean, how to identify them, and how to use them effectively to get their message across. A good example of how differing vocal intonations can totally change the meaning of the message being communicated was depicted in a video on nonverbal agendas. In the video, a manager has to relate verbatim the same message to three of her staff. She has ambivalent feelings toward one of the employees, dislike for one, and friendship for the other. The three scenarios clearly show that although the manager's words were the same with all three employees, her feelings, likes, dislikes, and biases were clearly projected in her vocal intonation as well as other observable behavior. Although the manager did not consciously realize what she was doing, the subconscious vocal message was clearly communicated to and identified by each of the three employees.

By learning more about vocal behavior and voice intonations, you will have a much better idea of the true feelings and intent of the people around you. In addition, you will have a better understanding of how others perceive you through your voice intonations.

## Power of Listening

How well do you hear what the other person is saying? The difference between “hearing” and “listening” is huge. Listening is a skill that must be learned. The *Power of Listening* eReport will give you every tool you’ll ever need to double your listening skills. You will know exactly what others are trying to communicate to you, especially when you combine your listening skills with your knowledge of vocal qualities.

## Projecting Emotions Vocally

The way in which a person varies any or all of the seven vocal qualities in conversations can significantly change the feeling or emotion of the message. By having the knowledge and awareness of the combinations of these vocal qualities and the respective emotions and feelings they project, you will be able to respond appropriately to these silent messages communicated to you through the vocal behavior of others. Here are the twelve common feelings and emotions that can be communicated simply through changes in voice qualities:

- **Affection** - Upward inflection, resonant, low volume, slow speed.
- **Anger** - loud volume, terse speech, irregular inflection.
- **Boredom** - Moderate to low volume, resonant, somewhat slow speed, descending inflection, little clarity.
- **Cheerful** - Somewhat high volume, fast speed, irregular inflection.
- **Impatience** - Normal to high pitch, fast speed.
- **Joy** - Loud volume, fast speed, ascending inflection.
- **Astonishment** - Ascending inflection
- **Defensiveness** - Terse speech.
- **Enthusiasm** - Loud volume, emphatic pitch.
- **Sadness** - Low volume, resonant, slow speed, descending inflection, little clarity.
- **Disbelief** - High pitch, drawn-out words.
- **Satisfaction** - Ascending inflection, little clarity.

Keep two things in mind about the vocal qualities of other people. First, you need to identify the other person’s habitual vocal qualities. When it comes to vocal qualities, what is characteristic for one person is not necessarily characteristic for another. Second, noting the changes from that characteristic vocal quality, both in kind and direction of change, will give you clues as to the feeling state of the speaker. Try to recognize how the other person typically speaks in relationship to the seven vocal qualities and, during your conversation, note any changes from that characteristic style. When changes do occur, the person is probably communicating something extra that isn’t carried in the words alone. It may indicate a point of emphasis,

something of importance or concern, or a shift in the way that person is feeling. If you are aware and sensitive to these clues as they are happening, you can respond to the changes and alter your communication if appropriate.

Developing the skill to understand vocal tones refines your interpersonal communication ability. It helps in building and improving solid, long-lasting working and personal relationships.

## Changes in Volume and Speed

Generally speaking, upward changes in a person’s volume and speed indicate a positive change in attitude. But if the rhythm is clipped, it could project anger. Downward changes in volume and speed, greater resonance, and lessened clarity usually project a change in a negative direction. However, they could also indicate affection or satisfaction. Any changes in rhythm usually mean a change in mood, which also can be positive or negative. With any of the foregoing changes, first be aware of their occurrence. Then use your clarification skills to determine specifically what those changes are indicating. Your responsibility is to rely on your listening, probing, and feedback skills to get at the root of the change. Once you’ve determined the exact nature of the change, you can do something about it. If it’s positive, you can capitalize on it. If the change is negative, you have an immediate warning that something needs to change — either adjust your message or explore the reasons for the change in the other person. When using your feedback skills for confirmation, make sure that you speak in terms of how the message is coming across to you, not in terms of the specific vocal qualities you are hearing. You are trying to exhibit sensitivity skills, not analytical skills.

## Speaking With Authority

*Speaking With Authority* is an eReport that is packed with tips to help you utilize the information in this eReport in presentations and speeches. You will learn how to speak with confidence and express your thoughts clearly and logically in front of two, ten, or two-hundred people.

## Using Your Vocal Qualities

“Don’t speak to me in that tone of voice!” is a familiar comment in interpersonal conflict. Your tone of voice often has more impact than your actual words. Your tone of voice communicates an important part of you and your personality to others.

Vocal quality is especially important over the telephone. You might find it a worthwhile exercise to tape-re-

cord only your half of several phone calls. After each call, replay the tape. How are you coming across to yourself? How does it sound? Are the volume and speed appropriate? What about the rhythm, inflection, resonance, and clarity? Do you feel that you were accurately communicating to the other person the emotions that you meant to communicate to him? By analyzing and constructively critiquing several of these phone calls, you can determine if any of your vocal qualities need improvement. As soon as you can identify these, think about how to improve them so you can start projecting the type of voice you would like to have.

Language can be interpreted in different ways, but through the use of vocal qualities you can clarify the intent of your message and communicate your feelings, likes, and dislikes. By varying tone, you can reinforce what you are saying verbally. For most people who work in an organizational environment, creating a vocal quality that conveys competence and assurance is important. Five aids to developing an assured voice are as follows:

- **Project a strong, full, but not overwhelming resonance.**
- **Use your mouth and lips to speak clearly and distinctly.**
- **Show enthusiasm by using the appropriate pitch, volume, and inflection.**
- **Be interesting by varying your vocal qualities – avoid speaking in a monotone voice.**
- **Speak naturally and at ease rather than adopting vocal qualities that do not fit who you are.**

Your part of the conversation can't be monotonous, or you will be boring. On the other hand, don't vary your intonations in the same manner every time and risk coming across like a machine. A mechanical voice is boring and sounds canned. Both the uninteresting voice and the voice that follows a mechanical pattern are monotonous. You can avoid this monotony by simply varying your vocal qualities, as the situation requires.

Speak rapidly when the subject matter permits, then emphasize an important point by speaking more slowly. By watching facial expressions and other nonverbal communications, you can determine the listener's degree of involvement. Emphasize points that apparently interest the listener and then pause to let the idea sink in. As you can see, timing in speech can be highly informative and effective to both you and your listeners.

A study at Yale University showed that the more errors a person made while speaking (errors meaning poor tone, volume, monotony, etc.), the more that speaker's discomfort and anxiety increased. Through practice and awareness, you can reduce these errors. By doing this, you will become much more comfortable with your speaking voice. This in turn will make your listeners more comfortable and they will listen more intently. You will have more credibility with them.

Carelessness in enunciation is likely to be taken as an indication of carelessness in other areas. Poor enunciation is also likely to result in the listener misunderstanding what you are saying. It can easily lead to a breakdown in the communication process. Good enunciation clarifies communication, which tends to strengthen and build relationships.

The foregoing vocal suggestions can be effective if they are used appropriately. Overuse or overemphasis of these methods may annoy your listeners and take their attention away from the conversation. Your use of these vocal skills must seem natural and spontaneous, or you will appear insincere. By using the proper vocal intonation, you can draw attention to those areas of your message that impact and benefit your listeners.

Most people know the importance of using effective vocal behavior when speaking to co-workers, employees, upper management, clients, and customers. An awareness of the subtle nuances, feelings, meanings, and emotions of vocal behavior is critical. It allows you to be aware of what you are (nonverbally) communicating to others and what they are (nonverbally) communicating to you. It can make or break working relationships. It can dramatically impact an organization's productivity as it affects the communication process of people working together. Becoming more aware of and sensitive to your vocal intonations and those of others can help you improve your credibility, and help you develop stronger working and personal relationships. That payoff seems well worth the effort.



## **Tony Alessandra, PhD, CSP, CPAE**

**Building Customers, Relationships, and the Bottom Line**

Dr. Tony Alessandra helps companies build customers, relationships, and the bottom line. Companies learn how to achieve market dominance through specific strategies designed to out-market, outsell, and out-service the competition.

Dr. Alessandra has a street-wise, college-smart perspective on business, having fought his way out of NYC to eventually realize success as a graduate professor of marketing, an entrepreneur, a business author, and a keynote speaker. He earned his MBA from the University of Connecticut, and his PhD in marketing from Georgia State University.

Dr. Alessandra is president of **Online Assessments**, ([www.OnlineAC.com](http://www.OnlineAC.com)) a company that offers online assessments and tests; co-founder of **MentorU.com**, an online e-learning company; and Chairman of the Board of **BrainX**, a company that offers online digital accelerated-learning programs.

Dr. Alessandra is a widely published author with 14 books translated into 17 foreign languages, including **Charisma** (Warner Books, 1998); **The Platinum Rule** (Warner Books, 1996); **Collaborative Selling** (John Wiley & Sons, 1993); and **Communicating at Work** (Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1993). He is featured in over 50 audio/video programs and films, including **Relationship Strategies** (American Media); **The Dynamics of Effective Listening** (Nightingale-Conant); and **Non-Manipulative Selling** (Walt Disney). He is also the originator of the internationally-recognized behavioral style assessment tool **The Platinum Rule™** ([www.PlatinumRule.com](http://www.PlatinumRule.com)).

Recognized by *Meetings & Conventions Magazine* as “one of America’s most electrifying speakers,” Dr. Alessandra was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame in 1985. He is also a member of the Speakers Roundtable, a group of 20 of the world’s top professional speakers. Tony’s polished style, powerful message, and proven ability as a consummate business strategist consistently earns rave reviews.

To learn more about Dr. Alessandra and his services, visit [\*\*www.Alessandra.com\*\*](http://www.Alessandra.com).



# Other products from **Dr. Tony Alessandra**

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**Versatility** eWorkbook

**Goal Setting Strategies** eReport

# NonVerbal Communication

## eREPORT

If you have found the information in this report useful, you might want to check out some of the other products available on my web site. I would specifically suggest:

### **Sending Out Your Best Silent Message**

When you meet someone for the first time, you make a statement about yourself before you ever even open your mouth. It's your "silent message," the way you carry yourself physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Such signals profoundly affect the way other people perceive you initially. Of course, image isn't everything, but it is important. A negative first impression may create roadblocks that disrupt relationships before they ever get started. You can control many elements of your image. *Sending Out Your Best Silent Message* is an eReport that identifies the key elements of a first impression and offers skill-building tips on how to maximize your own.

### **Interpersonal Communication**

It's nearly impossible to be productive and effective in today's world without being an effective communicator. If you cannot communicate with accuracy, how do you ever expect to get along with others at work or at home? *Interpersonal Communication* is an eReport that teaches you the essential skills to accurately and effectively receive and send messages. Good communication skills are a necessity for all people. Make sure yours are up to par.

### **PeopleSmart**

*PeopleSmart* is a unique blend of scientific research on human behavior and over twenty-five years of my experience teaching people skills through the Platinum Rule. After you've been exposed to the proven principles within the eBook, you'll have an uncommon knowledge of human interaction that will allow you to become a more loved and effective boss, gain effortless cooperation from the most difficult people, and get along with people from all walks of life. With *PeopleSmart* you actively and realistically take charge of your work relationships.

### **Speaking With Authority**

Studies show that the top predictor of professional success and upward mobility is how much you enjoy and how good you are at public speaking. Yet the number one fear of most adults is speaking in public. *Speaking with Authority* is an eReport that is packed with skill-building tips and exercises that will help you learn to speak confidently and express your thoughts clearly and logically.

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