

Behavior Dynamics Journal

A bi-monthly publication focusing on the Operational Application of Behavior

What is Nonverbal Communication and Why is it important?

We are all brought up to focus on the spoken word yet many studies show that the unspoken word or our nonverbal communication can be as high as 93%. The most frequently cited study is by Dr. Albert Mehrabian, of UCLA. His research has shown that 63- 93% of all human interaction and communication is nonverbal!

Long before man began to use words and sounds to communicate, nonverbal behavior was used to communicate. Our bodies reveal in real time what we are feeling and what we are often really thinking through our nonverbal behavior cues. Our posture, gestures, body movements, facial expressions and even tone of voice send a message that is either consistent or inconsistent with your spoken verbal message. For example, saying "yes" to a question but shaking your head "no" is inconsistent with your verbal message. Saying you really like some-

thing but your facial expression shows disgust by crinkling of the nose and upper lip signal disgust or dislike.



Displaying inconsistencies between your spoken word and your nonverbal indicators may signal something isn't right and others may begin to think that you are being dishonest or maybe hiding something. Even worse they may think that you are lying to them. Emotional Intelligence or self awareness of how you present yourself to other speaks volumes of who you are and what you are really thinking and feeling. Depending on what messages you are trying to send, your nonverbal cues will either betray that message or confirm it.

Another example of posture is folding your arms while beginning a conversation. This may signal a defensive state of mind or you may not be open to the conversation. Even if you feel comfortable doing that I often tell people that you are better off not assuming that posture. You are better off with a relaxed hands clasped or at your side which will signal you are open and genuinely interested. In an interview you want to sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair. This allows you to signal nonverbally that you are interested and engaged. Positioning your body to that of the interviewer shows at the very least cooperation, interest, sincerity and may even help with convincing the other party of honesty.

Recommended Reading

- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-kowal/pacing-pointing-poise-and_b_12427366.html
- <http://www.forbes.com/2010/11/10/body-language-nonverbal-leadership-careers-communication.html>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/extreme-fear/201005/top-ten-secrets-effective-liars>

Next Issue:

-Cultural Impact on Behavior

-Non-verbal Behavior Part 2

Nonverbal Behavior and Deception (Part 1 of 3)

In The Feeling of What Happens (Harcourt, 1999), neurologist Antonio Damasio points out the difference between "feeling" and "knowing that we have a feeling." He suggests, that, by the time we know we have a feeling, it's too late to do anything about it. The body has already started giving responses to the emotions, whether they are primary ones such as surprise, fear or secondary emotions—Damasio calls them "social emotions"—such as guilt.

Overall body posture and the range of motion of the limbs relative to the trunk; the spatial profile of limb movements, which can be smooth or jerky; the speed of motions; the congruence of movements

occurring in different body tiers such as face, hands, and legs; and last and perhaps most important, the sub conscious, cross cultural display of emotion across the face or micro-expressions. Damasio's categories of behaviors that we all share point out where to look for the differences in the way people express stress. Just how "smooth or jerky" you move your arms, or how you twist your face into a disgusted look, add variations to basic behavior patterns. Culture, training and everything that goes into making each of us unique can make it difficult to ascertain what specific body responses mean—with some exceptions. Which is why you can't rely on observations only. You have to follow up with specific questions and

engagement to help to confirm or dispel your initial observations. The first exception is, if you know what a person does with her arms, hands, legs and face under normal circumstances (the baseline), then you can spot deviations. People react differently to stressful situations so knowing how they react under stress can help us get a better read of what is causing them stress when we see it happening.

