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How body language affects communication

Body language is nonverbal communication in which physical behaviors can be used to express information not only through words. These physical behaviors include as simple things as facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch and how you use your space. Body language exists everywhere with everybody but it’s how you interpret human body language that really makes the difference. This is also known as kinesics, “the study of body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as a means of communication”(“Kinesics”). However, kinesics is not a form of sign language. Sign language is no different than spoken languages in that it has a complete grammar system. Body language has no system of grammar so it must be interpreted broadly and differently from person to person. Facial expressions are the dominant body language when showing emotion. Everything on the face including the eyes, eyebrows, lips, cheeks, and nose all play a role in describing and displaying what emotion a person is feeling at that time. When interpreting emotions, facial expressions and the way you move your body are key. Faces are the primary source of emotional information, they give information on characteristics of personal identity that otherwise wouldn’t be communicated verbally. The importance of body language while communicating is clear, we are judged by the way we act, it’s how we show confidence, and is crucial to control if you want to be an effective communicator.

How does body language and facial expressions affect the way we communicate? Body language can be used to communicate on a conscious or subconscious level. It is almost its own language. Most people actually speak with body language without even realizing that they are doing it. This article used a great quote, "it's not what you said it's how you said it” (quora). I think we forget how important body language is when communicating with other people. People don't only listen to your words they also listen to the way you express them. Being personable with the way you speak and act is one of the most important parts of being able to effectively communicate. Putting effort into the way you express yourself makes a huge difference in the way people look at you. It shows you have a certain sense of comfortability with yourself and that you aren’t afraid to be open about how you feel and who you are.

“It is very important to remember that body language is present in our everyday lives. One should also not forget that it affects you and your relationship with other people”(Sayers). No matter where we go or who we talk to, body language always plays a role in the way we communicate with others. Poor body language can make the difference between having a good conversation with someone or an awkward and terrible one. It makes all the difference when making a first impression when meeting new people. Body language is also key during an interview. Someone wouldn’t want to hire a person who’s all slouched over and avoids eye contact. Body language shows who you are as a person. If you walk with your head held up high and look where you are going people will move for you because you are displaying confidence. If you use eye contact when talking to people, people are more likely to listen to you.

Body language and facial expressions affect the way people judge you. A few experiments by Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov show, “all it takes is a tenth of a second to form an impression of a stranger from their face, and that longer exposures don’t significantly alter those impressions”(Wargo). Within a fraction of a second you have already been judged by someone around you wherever you go. The judgements they make are on as little of things as smiling or whether you’re looking down or not. Socially, the small things make all the difference. Smiling shows you are a happy person who is probably easy to talk to. Smiling is one of the easiest facial expressions to show but is also the easiest to forget to do. In my opinion, it is the most important facial expression of them all when meeting new people or going out with friends. Smiling tells others subconsciously that you are a friendly person. They might be more inclined to start up a conversation with you and would enjoy your presence a lot more. Another example would be first impressions. First impressions mean everything. If you’re first introducing yourself to someone you’d want to talk to a person with a firm handshake, a huge smile, uses good eye contact, and shows complete confidence in themselves through body language. No one is going to want to talk to an insecure sad, depressed, nervous looking person who avoids eye contact all together. “Judgments based on facial appearance play a powerful role in how we treat others, and how we get treated”(Wargo). Whether we like it or not, facial expressions play a major role in how you are judged. This greatly affects communication. If you are judged as a hard to talk to shy person, no one will make the effort to communicate with you unless they absolutely want to. It’s important to be someone who people feel comfortable with if you want to be an effective communicator.

Body language also shows how confident someone truly is. Some people have an unmistakable confidence about them and people find that extremely attractive. Showing confidence is key and the best way show confidence is through body language and facial expressions. “But more than anything else, body language is how you communicate with someone you just met. And if you're not careful, your body language may be projecting a very different image than what you intend”(Nobles). Having more of an assertive posture compared to a slouched posture shows a great amount of confidence. Also, the ability to maintain contact is crucial to communicated to others that you are honest, approachable and very confident. What you do with your hands also sends different signals. If you are fidgeting or always have your hands in your pockets it shows you are withdrawn or nervous. If you have a stern face people will assume that you are upset or not easily approachable even if that isn’t what your true emotions are. Body language can be your best friend or your worst enemy. It can communicate to others the opposite of what your feelings truly are without you even realizing it.

It’s extremely important to pay attention to how you appear to others when talking to others. We pay attention to the things we say and wouldn’t say certain offensive things in front of certain people. So why should you feel any other way when using a different form of communication. Nonverbal communication can easily be taken the wrong way and you can end up sending the wrong messages across to others. Whether you want to be or not you are constantly communicating with the people around you. You may be aware of this or you may not be. If you’re not aware that’s when trouble can set in and people can get different vibes off of you. “Since a large part of communication comes from body language, which includes posture and facial expressions, take great care in the messages you put out there”(Nobles). The non verbal communication you send to others determines what people think of you. Once you start becoming aware of what messages you are sending, you can begin to control what you want others to think of you. This is the difference between someone who is absolutely excelling at life to someone who looks like they are down in the dumps. Always ask yourself, what message am I trying to send?

Words alone only account for a small percent of the way something is actually understood. Body language is the biggest way attitude is expressed on to others. “Prof. Mehrabian quantified this tendency: words, tone of voice, and body language respectively account for 7%, 38%, and 55% of personal communication”(Bellundi). It’s not about what you say it’s about how you say it. Your words have little to no meaning if your tone of voice and body language don’t have the same meaning behind them. “If a speaker’s words and body language differ, listeners are more likely to believe the nonverbal communication of the speaker, not his words”(Bellundi). The importance of body language is clear. It triumphs over the words being said and the tone of voice used. For example, If one was to say they were sorry for something they did but didn’t make eye contact and didn’t convey emotion into their voice why would that person believe they are sincere in being sorry? Body language and the tone of your voice are crucial when wanting to appear sincere and truthful about anything. To be anywhere near effective or persuasive with verbally communicating, it is essential to compliment your words with the appropriate body language and tone of voice.

So, when exactly does body language come into play? Subconsciously, no matter who you’re talking to, they are judging your body language and you are judging there’s. We as humans are really good about picking up on nonverbal cues and can tell when someone is being truthful or not a lot of the time. Overtime as we age and deal with different types of people, we become wise with age and have been trained to notice more of the subtle cues. Before lying, a person might pull their ear, scratch their nose, simply quit talking with their hands, or completely avoid eye contact. The better we understand when we are being lied to the better we can communicate. The people around us give off clues as to what they are truly thinking and who they truly are. In my experience, playing in games of poker is the greatest way of learning these. Learning another player’s tell is key to beating them to the pot and guessing what cards they’re holding. I’ve used this against other people in poker by giving off fake tells to make them believe that they have the better hand. When in reality it was me giving off these cues that are supposed to be given off subconsciously. Subconsciously, other people have no idea they are being tricked because they are unaware they are even noticing a tell. Using this to your advantage in poker is an easy way to stay ahead of the rest of the table. You can use body language to your advantage by purposely appearing more confident than you actually are.

Learning to have a handle on your body language is a sure way to earn the respect and trust of others very quickly. Being able to control your body language and using it to your advantage is a key way to get ahead in life. Mastering body language is like learning a whole new language, but once you get good at it you can effectively communicate at almost anyone’s level. Knowing your own body language and being able to control it puts you way ahead of the game while making it all the more easier to get what you want. High stress events in life such as a job interview or giving a speech can easily be taken control of by a good use of body language. No one is going to listen to a boring speech with someone who appears to not know what he’s talking about. You have to own everything you say and say and fully express how you feel about it. Your words mean almost nothing if there isn’t any nonverbal communication backing them up. If you are constantly giving off bad vibes, no one is going to pay any attention to you and you will be a very unliked person. That’s just how the world works. Working on how you express yourself and your confidence in doing so makes the world of difference in communication.

Overall, nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice greatly affect our overall communication between people. Only 7% of the way we communicate comes from words. If you want to even get close to effectively communicating you have to focus in on what your body is saying to the rest of the world. Conveying our words in a certain way is much more important than the actual words themselves. Confidence is key when effectively communicating and the easiest way to show that is through body language and other nonverbal clues. Whether you’re just meeting a stranger for the first time, going in for that first job, or simply having a conversation with a close friend or relative, you should always keep in mind how you’re non verbally communicating with people. Actions really do speak louder than words. Paying attention your actions will help you to be better understood and will help you to better communicate with others. Nonverbal clues are an unspoken language that a lot of people forget exists. Once you are able to learn this language and be able to use it along with verbal communication, you appear more confident, are able to better communicate, and are much less misunderstood in conversation. I did answer my question of how non verbal cues affect the way that we communicate. I was surprised to learn how important body language truly is when communicating with anyone. Learning to match up body language with your words is absolutely crucial if you plan on even trying to communicate with anyone. Subconsciously giving off vibes that show you are hiding something can be devastating especially when you don’t even know that you’re doing it. Having the smile, stance, eye contact, posture, and confidence is something we should all be aware of having if we want to be able to effectively communicate and be thought of as a truthful person. Without others being able to have confidence in what you say is the truth, nothing that you say will have any meaning.

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