

JACK (*dropping his papers, scrambling for them, getting up, and quickly looking past you as he shifts from one foot to the other*): "Yeah, sure, I'm fine. Everything's just fine."

you: "Gee, you seem a little distracted."

JACK (*stepping back, finally looking at you*): "No, no—believe me, I'm okay (*heaving a sigh*). Everything's—just—uh—great . . . (*looking off*). Yeah, great . . ."

Do you believe Jack? Would you accept what he says about everything being fine? What do you think is really going on: Just been fired? Messed up on the job? How do you know? What clues do you use to give you the answers?

Go back and read the scene again, but without the directions in parentheses. The words alone don't tell you what you need to know, do they? Actually, the information about how Jack really feels emerges only from what he *does*, in contrast to what he *says*. And if you turned the sound off and just watched this scene, you'd get a much clearer message more directly, wouldn't you?

Multi-Messages

We all share a primary human need not just to accept what is communicated to us, but to evaluate it. We automatically filter incoming messages through such questions as: "What does this really mean?" "Can I trust him?" "Why is she saying or doing this?"

This need to understand fully and to put things in context requires us to look for as much information as we can.

Go back to that scene with Jack. Look at all the information you would automatically notice and gather from his non-verbal language and consider how quickly you would understand its meaning.

- Body language: Jack shifts his feet (can't hold his ground). He twitches, gestures, nervously drops his papers, scrambles hastily for them (can't stop moving, seems uncoordinated in a simple task).

- Eye contact: Jack can't look at you; he looks off, thinking. (Why does he avoid me? What is he hiding?)

- Space relationship: You get closer; he backs away. (Doesn't want contact; avoids my personal outreach.)

- Speech rhythm: Jack speaks hastily (trying to get done with it); long pauses between his words (reflective, thinking of something else?); sighs