



Book The Secret Language of Business

How to Read Anyone in 3 Seconds or Less

Kevin Hogan
Wiley, 2008

Recommendation

Despite the tantalizing title, this book by body language expert Kevin Hogan reveals few secrets as it introduces the study of nonverbal communication. However, much of the book's thorough material on body language is useful and accurate, though basic – the kind of thing most people know intuitively. Hogan explores how body language, physical positioning, appearance, tone of voice, eye contact and the like communicate more than words ever could. Then, he explains how you can use this knowledge to improve every interaction you have in business. Much of the advice is specific to western cultures, though the author discusses other norms. If you're looking for an easy-to-read overview on this subject, *BooksInShort* suggests beginning with this user-friendly text. It covers the fundamentals, and the take-aways ending each chapter make it easy to digest.

Take-Aways

- The words you speak and write form only a fraction of the message you convey.
- Nonverbal behavior accounts for the majority of the content you communicate.
- People are “senders, receivers and observers” of nonverbal communication.
- Children and teenagers are very expressive with their body language. As people grow older, they gain more control over their reactions.
- “Eyes, face, gestures, touch, posture, movement, appearance and voice” all contribute to body language.
- “Context” and “environment” influence how people perceive and understand body language.
- People make snap judgments based on your appearance and body language.
- Connect and build rapport with others by “mirroring, listening and reciprocating.”
- Use body language to help generate a successful outcome in business meetings.
- Almost every interaction contains “like” or “dislike” and “truth” or “deception.”

Summary

Say What?

People communicate through language, but the words you say, or even write, are only part of what you communicate. The messages you don't verbalize, but convey in a variety of other ways, such as gestures, dress, body position or tone of voice, account for the majority of the content you communicate. To become an effective communicator, study nonverbal communication, which is generally defined as, “The process of sending and receiving messages without using words.” According to Mark Knapp, author of *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, body language types fall into six categories:

1. **“Repeating”** – Gestures or body language that support a statement.
2. **“Conflicting”** – Body language that contradicts what the speaker is saying.
3. **“Complementing”** – Genuine behavior that reinforces the spoken word.
4. **“Substituting”** – Nonverbal behavior that someone uses in place of words.
5. **“Accenting/Moderating”** – Body language used to emphasize or underplay a point.
6. **“Regulating”** – Nonverbal communication that punctuates or paces a conversation.

“Sender, Receiver and Observer”

Because body language and other nonverbal behaviors play a leading role in the process of communicating, accomplished communicators learn to read and use them proactively. When it comes to messages, you can be a sender, a receiver or an observer. Receivers process huge amounts of information, much of it unconsciously, to form opinions of a sender’s messages. As a receiver, you decipher other people’s nonverbal behaviors and respond with your own. Observers read nonverbal interactions and behaviors, using interpretations influenced by their own way of perceiving the world.

“Body language is one of the most powerful components of the communication process, and you have the choice of how you use it.”

A sender’s body language uses a fluid combination of behaviors, which researchers categorize as either “conscious,” that is, intentional, or “unconscious,” that is, impulsive. For instance, avoiding eye contact with someone to whom you owe money would be a “deliberate” or conscious behavior, as would sitting up straight and smiling when you are introduced to someone you want to impress, or standing over a misbehaving child as you issue a reprimand. “Spontaneous” body language includes gestures and reactions you present without thinking about them. Extroverted people are more expansive with their body language, as are children and adolescents. As people grow older, they tend to gain greater control of their spontaneous reactions, thereby showing the world less of what they are feeling.

Body Language – Break it Down

The “elements of body language” combine to send infinite messages. They are:

- **“Eyes”** – People notice and connect with the eyes first. Eye usage, which is both conscious and unconscious, transmits many messages. A steady or darting gaze, rapid blinking or dilated pupils convey a variety of emotions.
- **“Facial expressions”** – The face transmits emotions through various expressions, from happiness and love to anxiety, fear, annoyance or misery.
- **“Gestures”** – These actions can communicate a message, or support and enhance the verbal component of the content you want to convey.
- **“Touch”** – This category further divides into “professional,” such as the touch of a doctor examining a patient; “social,” as in a handshake; “friendship,” like holding hands; or “intimacy,” as in a lover’s embrace.
- **“Posture”** – The position of your body affects the meaning of your message. Sitting, standing strait or slumped, tilting your head or holding your arms various ways create impressions and convey meaning.
- **“Movement”** – This element of body language can generate a feeling of intimacy or closeness, indicate subservience, or communicate authority and power.
- **“Appearance”** – How you look sends a message, whether you want it to or not. People will attribute meaning to your hair color, shoes, height and everything else.
- **“Voice”** – Although it seems contradictory to view voice as nonverbal, your “tone, pitch and tempo” are among the vocal characteristics that influence perception.

The Framework of Interpretation

Nonverbal communication does not take place in a vacuum. Body language can have different meanings in different settings. Both “context and environment” influence the ways people perceive and understand body language. Background, experiences, character, gender and self-perception influence a receiver’s acuity. A situation’s “formality, privacy, familiarity, warmth, distance, constraint and time” shape participants’ perceptions. For instance, a person in a formal environment will use more controlled, conventional body language. Someone might relish the privacy of an intimate setting as an opportunity for sharing his or her thoughts. When your surroundings feel comfortable and familiar, your nonverbal signals will reflect a relaxed attitude.

“The words you and I say are darned important, but the nonverbal communication we send and receive is far more important.”

Men and women use and convey body language differently. In general, women are more naturally proficient at sending and reading nonverbal messages. A confident man who speaks a bit loudly seems powerful and in control, but a forcible woman may appear to be aggressive or pushy.

If you are unaware of how a person’s cultural norms define acceptable behavior, you may be confused when you try to read his or her body language. Some forms of nonverbal communication are universal, such as facial expressions that convey emotion, but a simple gesture in one country can mean something very different in another country. Nonverbal messages vary in the arenas of “eye contact, gestures and territorial space.” For instance, in the U.S., managers expect eye contact as long as the look doesn’t become a stare or glare. However, in Eastern cultures, employees avert their eyes from a boss as a form of respect. People from Central and South America and the Middle East touch each other frequently during interactions. Yet in Italy, people use touch to control a conversation.

“The conscious mind is more influenced by words and the nonconscious mind is more influenced by everything else.”

The way people interpret personal space also differs depending on their culture, nationality or even environment. Italians and Latin Americans are comfortable standing very close to one another, while in the U.S., the U.K. and Asia, standing too close is uncomfortable. E.T. Hall, a pioneer in the study of “proxemics” or the concept of personal space, isolated these four zones:

1. **“Intimate space”** – The orbit of 1.5 feet [0–45cm] around your body.
2. **“Personal space”** – In the range of 1.5 feet to 48 inches [45–125cm] away.
3. **“Social space”** – The length of 48 inches to four yards [125–365cm] away.
4. **“Public space”** – Farther from you than four yards [365cm +].

What You (Don’t) Say

The messages people constantly send via body language fall into these six groups:

1. **“Status”** – Height conveys power and status. You can increase your height, no matter how short you are, by improving your posture. You can also increase your status by initiating touch, such as extending your hand to shake, or by choosing a location that conveys hierarchical position, such as sitting at the head of a table.
2. **“Dominance”** – People assert dominance by choosing an elevated position, such as a podium. You can also convey dominance through hand positions. Holding your palms facing up is less dominant than holding them facing down. Various forms of body maneuvering, such as taking a place at the front of a line, also express dominance.
3. **“Submission”** – Spotting submission in the animal kingdom is easy. A dog will roll over to show subservience to another dog. Humans express submission by avoiding eye contact, backing away or taking a lower position, like sitting while someone else stands.
4. **“Uncertainty”** – Hesitant or tentative actions, or flitting eye movements come across as uncertain.
5. **“Confidence”** – Show confidence by standing upright and using steady movements.
6. **“Personal identity”** – Your body language reflects what you think and feel about yourself. For example, an athlete will move with strength and grace.

Impressions and Connections

People take in your appearance and body language, and make snap judgments about you before you utter a word. You can't dodge first impressions, so being aware of the image you project is constructive. To make a positive impact, wear tidy, clean clothing that suits you. Walk and hold yourself with confidence. Make eye contact. Smile. Infuse your greetings with warmth and reach out to shake hands. Be aware of the other person's personal space and stand around four feet away, holding your body at a slight angle.

“Building rapport is very much like a dance. You and your partner meet in the middle and then negotiate your way through a variety of steps.”

Before you can have an honest conversation with someone, you need to establish rapport, which people build from a foundation of shared interests and ideas. Trust, a natural extension of rapport, increases over time. As you establish a relationship, remember how revealing body language is and deliberately project what you want to communicate. To discern the content behind someone's words, learn to read his or her cues accurately. “Eye contact” and “body movement” are particularly enlightening when deciphering messages or determining authenticity. The three-steps for building warm rapport are:

- **“Mirroring”** – Use “your body language, your movements, your posture, your tone of voice, your style of dress” and other signals to reflect the other person.
- **“Listening”** – “Ask open-ended questions and listen for key wants and needs, check for understanding.”
- **“Reciprocating”** – Treat other people exactly as they treat you, like giving a firm or soft handshake, depending on theirs, or swapping business cards.

Making it Work

Because context plays such a major role in nonverbal communication, you must understand your business environment. Align your body language with your surroundings. The four most common workplace environments are: “conservative, casual, industrial and academic.”

“To sharpen your understanding of body language and nonverbal behavior...consciously observe the interactions all around you.”

To use body language to influence the success of business meetings, start by being aware of where and how you sit. Keep the space around you uncluttered and act within the confines of any written or implicit rules. You can also use your awareness of body language to help you sell. First, establish a connection with a potential client by following the three steps to building rapport: showing genuine interest, asking questions and listening attentively to the answers. Keep your gestures refined and unthreatening, and arrange your body in a nonconfrontational position. When you make a sales pitch to a right-handed person, you'll increase your chances of success by sitting on his or her right side.

Use It to Improve It

Building your nonverbal communication abilities will help you reach others more effectively, thereby improving your relationships, conversations and even the way you talk to yourself. The process of using self-talk and body language to influence the way you feel is part of the science of “neuro-linguistic programming.”

“There's nothing ‘nice’ or ‘mean’ about reading body language and nonverbal communication. It's not good or bad, it's simply reading and interpreting.”

After an interaction, have you ever found yourself wondering if the other people liked you, if they were lying to you or if they could tell you didn't like them? Such speculations are normal because almost every interaction contains a modicum of a “like/dislike” or “truth/deception” balance. To react to such messages accurately and honestly, use nonverbal behavior. For example, show people you like them by making eye contact, smiling warmly, nodding your head in agreement, assuming a relaxed body position and mirroring their movements. Alternately, to communicate dislike, stand slightly turned away, smile infrequently, avoid eye contact and assume a protective body stance.

About the Author

Dr. Kevin Hogan has written several books, including the bestseller, *The Psychology of Persuasion: How to Persuade Others to Your Way of Thinking*. He's a body language expert, speaker, consultant and business coach who appears frequently in the media.