

Quick Guide: Mind your (body) language

Words are only a very small part of communication. While you are saying the words, your body may well be saying something else! So here are the **top ten tips** to help you get your message across in the way you intend:

- 1. Check your inner dialogue** (how you talk to yourself) before saying anything, otherwise your body language will "leak": it will send clues which give away your thoughts and feelings despite your attempts to disguise them.
- 2. Your eyes can speak louder than words.** So aim for a steady, relaxed eye contact, avoiding an intrusive stare or a shifting gaze. Your eyes can be the window to your soul, so get the inner dialogue right and your eyes will send a congruent message.
- 3. Consider your posture.** Upright and balanced says just that. It is impossible to deliver a confident, assertive message if you are hunched or standing on one hip.
- 4. Get to know your own personal space** and be sensitive to that of others. Find out whether positioning yourself closer to or farther away from the other person is more effective. Beware of "leaning in" to discuss confidential issues; use your voice instead.
- 5. Do you talk with your hands?** Frequent, large hand movements can detract from your verbal message as the listener focuses in on them. Calm, open gestures say you are confident and in control of yourself.
- 6. Beware the automatic smile:** one where there is no smile in your eyes. This is a common leakage. It says 'please don't be angry', or 'I don't want to seem rude', when you have some straight talking to do.
- 7.** If you are nervous or worried about a conversation, **take the time to breathe and to relax.** This will help avoid changes in your pitch and tone which can signal timidity, whining, anger, frustration etc.
- 8. Take care over your dress and grooming** as they contribute to the language of your message. It can say sloppy and untidy or professional and polished.
- 9. Don't forget your props!** Consider the message if you peer over your glasses; if your jewellery clinks noisily; or if your papers shake in your hands as you hold them.
- 10. Finally, remember to consider the whole picture you present,** not just one aspect, and you will have more success in sending the message you intended.

Compiled by Des Whitehorn