

The Power of Nonverbal Language

by Christine W. Zust, M.A.



One of the most powerful communication tools you use with key clients and customers is your nonverbal language, or, body language. Yet, few people pay attention to what their actions say about them.

Statistics prove that 93% of what you communicate comes from your tone of voice, inflection, facial expressions and body language, and only 7% is communicated with words. The old adage, “Actions speak louder than words” rings true.

Knowing this, what does your nonverbal language say about you? Is it working for or against you? Are your verbal and nonverbal languages consistent, or are you sending mixed messages? How you silently communicate reveals to customers if you want to do business with them. It also shows them how interested you are in learning about and fulfilling their needs. Here are a few nonverbal communication tools which have great impact.

1. Silence. Silence is a commanding form of nonverbal communication if you let it.. Unfortunately, many of us, either in conversations with colleagues or in presentations, are compelled to fill every second with words. Think of how much more powerful John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not” speech was because he used silence. “Ask not what your country can do for you (pause). Ask what you can do for your country.” That effective use of pausing, silence, allowed the audience to absorb his message. Most Americans feel uncomfortable with “pregnant pauses.” It feels awkward to us. We don’t know what to do with ourselves. The only way to get over that fear is to raise your comfort level and embrace silence. Use it to add influence to your presentations and client meetings. Silence does several things for you -- it gives you time to collect your thoughts and stay on track, it lets the listener digest your message, and it gives you some extra time to “read” your client’s response.

2. Eye contact. The eyes are the window to the soul, and people who master eye contact reap the rewards. Use a relaxed, steady gaze, and be careful not to stare at the other person. Consistent eye contact positions you as confident, at ease and interested. Looking directly at someone with a sincere glance reveals that you are open and engaging in your communication style. People whose eyes dart around as if they’re visually chasing a fly in the room lead us to wonder what they are hiding. If you are shy and have a hard time looking directly into the eye, then pick a “safe” spot on the face to look upon -- on the bridge of the other person’s nose or the tip of the eyebrow, which is close enough to the eyes to adjust your comfort level.

3. Body stance. Your level of confidence is communicated through your body stance and movement. Stand erect, shoulders back, chin up, and chest open, with your weight evenly distributed to both feet. Do not slouch. Slouching symbolizes indifference or weakness. On the flip side, don’t be too puffed up, or your customers will think you are arrogant and self-important.

Some of the most powerful messages you send are not spoken. Be sure you are using the right “silent language” to communicate with your clients and customers.

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