LEADERSHIP & NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION  
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It is a fact that body language makes up at least 75% of all communication! Body language is a kind of nonverbal communication, where thoughts, intentions, or feelings are expressed by physical behaviors. These physical behaviors include facial expressions, body posture, muscle tension, gestures, (legs, arms, hands, head and torso), eye movement, touch and the use of space. Body language also includes skin coloring (flushed red), even people’s breathing rate and perspiration. What you communicate through your body language and nonverbal signals affects how others see you, how well they like and respect you, and whether or not they trust you.

The difference between the words people speak and our understanding of what they are saying comes from this non-verbal communication. The way we talk, walk, sit and stand all say something about us. By developing your awareness of the signs and signals of body language, you can more easily understand other people, and more effectively manage and communicate with them. What’s more, by increasing your understanding of others, you also become more aware of the messages that you convey to them.

First impressions are important and can significantly form our initial perceptions about someone. As you observe others, you can identify some common signs and signals that give away whether they are feeling positive and confident. Typical things to look for in confident people include: Posture – standing tall with shoulders back. Eye contact – solid with a ‘smiling’ face. Gestures with hands and arms – purposeful and deliberate. Speech – slow and clear. Tone of voice – moderate to low.

On the other hand, there are signs and signals that indicate a person may be insecure and defensive. These Indications of insecurity and defensiveness may include: hand/arm gestures that are small and close to his or her body; facial expressions that are minimal; body posture is turned away from you; arms are crossed in front of body; and eyes maintain little contact, or are downcast. By identifying these signs, you can change what you say or how you say it to help the other person become more at ease and more receptive to what you are saying.

We are all unique, and our signs and signals may have a different underlying meaning based on culture. This is why it’s important to check that your interpretation of someone else’s body language is correct. You might do this through the use of inquiry, or simply by getting to know the person better. To help practice and further develop your skill in picking up body language signals, engage in people watching. Observe people and notice how they act and react to each other. When you watch others, try to get a sense of what is going on between them. Whether or not you get the chance to check if you are correct in your assessment, you will be developing your observational skills. A few body language behaviors that successful leaders consistently apply to exude confidence and strong leadership skills include:

**VOCAL TONE:** We all know that animals can hear undertones outside of human range, but the fact is that we unconsciously hear them, too! Incredibly, studies conducted at Kent State University indicated that hearing those soothing low tones actually makes people more efficient, while removing the low tones makes people less efficient. Those with the best undertones are natural leaders, and people around them subconsciously match their tones to those of the leader.

**SMILE:** It is hard to feel bad when you are smiling. Why is that? It has to do with the chemicals that are released in the brain when we smile or see other people smile. Smiling triggers the “feel good” hormones like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins. These chemicals relax your body, reduce your heart rate and blood pressure, and help you fight off stress. This makes you feel healthier and appear more confident. In addition, your smile triggers other people’s brains to respond in kind - in other words your smile is contagious.

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DEVELOP A FIRM HANDSHAKE: Your handshake is often the first connection you make with someone. It may appear to be a perfunctory daily gesture, but it is not. A handshake creates an immediate impression and, you only have one chance to create a good first impression. A handshake can be the equalizer. It conveys that a person is confident, extroverted and positive. A handshake should be given with sincerity and warmth and should be firm but not aggressive.

FACIAL EXPRESSION: Facial expression is integral when expressing emotions through the body. Combinations of eyes, eyebrow, lips, nose, and cheek movements help form different moods of an individual (e.g. happy, sad, depressed, angry, etc.). A few studies show that facial expression and bodily expression (i.e. body language) are congruent when interpreting emotions. This means that the brain processes the other’s facial and bodily expressions simultaneously. This is because the face and the body are normally seen together in their natural proportions and the emotional signals from the face and body are well integrated.

POWERFUL POSTURE: Emotions can also be detected through body postures. Strong leaders convey their self confidence and strength subtly but clearly through their posture. An outstretched, open posture projects an image of power and confidence. Sitting or standing postures can also indicate emotions. Leaning forward, head nodding along with the discussion implies that the person is open, relaxed and is actively listening. On the other hand, arms crossed and looking around implies the person is emotionally detached from the discussion. Be aware, small differences in postures can mean a lot.

EYE CONTACT: When a person makes eye contact with you, especially when you are talking, you feel important to that person, and your confidence in that person grows. According to Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.d. and author of “The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help - or Hurt How You Lead.” “Just the right” amount of eye contact – the amount that produces a feeling of mutual likability and trustworthiness – will vary with situations, settings, personality types, gender and cultural differences. As a general rule, though, direct eye contact ranging from 40% to 60% of the time during a conversation – more when you are listening, less when you are speaking – should make for a comfortable productive atmosphere. Like our voice, our eyes convey everything. Eye contact connects us literally and figuratively with one another.

Successful leaders don’t just rely on instincts, instead they also strategically choose appropriate behaviors to achieve desired results. In order to be a successful leader at the highest levels, you need to not only understand exactly how your body language impacts perceptions, you also need to be consciously aware of and choose behaviors that allow you to be the most influential. Anyone can understand, learn, and harness appropriate body language. A great way to start is by increasing your awareness through observation and practicing some of the above positive body language tips.

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