



It's not what you say; it's the way that you say it.

Numerous studies and reports have documented that a necessary skill for exchanging information effectively is the ability to build rapport.

Building rapport doesn't necessarily involve liking or agreeing with someone. It does however mean that the other party *feels* that you have engaged with them and that you respect them. Your behaviour has been responsive.

Non-verbal communication, more commonly known as body language, is an important element of any interaction between two people – whether they are networking, trying to build a relationship with an existing client, attending a first presentation, or negotiating a deal.

We are all generally familiar with “macro” types of mirroring: mirroring on this scale is, for example, dressing appropriately for a particular occasion. As a more refined example, we tend to match our table manners and body postures to the level of formality we perceive to be congruent with the place and people with whom we are dining. Mirroring on its various levels is the behavioural equivalent of agreeing with someone verbally.

Developing your abilities in body language can also significantly enhance your performance in business by helping you appear to be more confident and giving you greater insight into what other people are thinking – thus enabling you to maximise the effectiveness of your presentation.



Only a fraction of the meaning in any interaction is communicated through the actual words and almost 70% of the meaning is conveyed by non-verbal means – whether this is your appearance,



the way you speak or your body language.

Interpreting body language

However, once you start to consciously watch others' body language, it is important to avoid taking a simplistic approach as it can be very easy to misinterpret environmental factors. For example, when people are cold they may fold their arms – which can otherwise indicate they feel threatened, resistant or insecure. It is better to look at several gestures rather than one in isolation.

Non-verbal communication is dictated largely by culture. This is often the reason why negotiations with people from the Middle or Far East are so much more difficult than those with fellow Europeans – there is a much higher risk of misreading each other's signals. It is also why some cultures need more personal space than others to feel comfortable.

Most people know how to camouflage their true feelings through their facial expressions, but are less aware of the messages being portrayed by their overall posture, their hands and arms and their feet and legs.

It only takes a few seconds for people to form a first impression of you, and your non-verbal signals play a significant role. As there is evidence that first impressions are seldom overturned, you can appreciate how important it is to make a good first impression.

3 tips on creating positive first impressions

- When the eyes do not reflect the smile, people sense that the smile is false. Always make eye contact when you are smiling: but don't fall into the trap of looking too intensely: the other person may feel that they are being stared down.





- In Western culture, the handshake is the only point in business where touching is generally acceptable. By shaking hands when introducing yourself, you will register your name more effectively. Handshakes that are too strong or too weak have a big impact on the first impression that you create. Even touch that is not registered at a conscious level (for example, as someone hands you some papers) will have a strong impact.
- An open stance gives the impression of confidence. Neither your arms nor legs should be crossed. It is a fact that taller people have advantage, so stand straight to make the most of your height. However, adopting a height advantage over those around you can be perceived as a power play, so must be used carefully. Actions such as raising spectacles or pens to eye level or, worst of all, resting your head back in your hands whilst leaning back in your chair and looking at the ceiling are also examples of power play.

8 tips on non-verbal communication

- When speaking to a group of people, increase everyone's sense of involvement by making eye contact with all the individuals in turn.
- To appear confident, adopt an open stance (no crossed arms or legs which act as barriers), take as much body space as you can and use hand and arm gestures when you speak and smile.
- If you suspect that someone may be deceiving you, then some signs to watch for are
 - increased touching of the mouth and chin area,
 - a reduced amount of gestures and different eye contact to normal (can be reduced eye contact).





- a 'choker' gesture – where the throat is being covered.
- different language patterns
- Prolonged chin stroking (as opposed to brief touch) can be a sign of decision-making.
- To identify whether this decision-making is moving your way, then look out for a sudden move to sit forward or a tilt of the head (as if to listen more intently), as this can be a buying signal.
- People also sit forward when they wish to speak – they will try to pick up the eye contact 'baton'.
- If someone sits back, then you have lost their interest. Other signs of this include glazed eyes, a head resting on a hand and the more obvious yawning, strumming fingers and tapping feet that are signs of impatience or anxiety and a desire to get away.
- On the contrary, smiles and nodding of the head demonstrate interest and attention and an encouragement to continue speaking.

Non-verbal communication is not only important when you are interacting. Take a look at the photos in your brochures and on your web site – what do they say about your organisation and your people? There are many brochures where the words say 'friendly and approachable' and the photos show stern and serious faces. What does your brochure say?



Rapport

Finally, we return to creating rapport and the role of mirroring. When someone's non verbal communication mirrors your own it indicates that they feel a degree of rapport



with you. You can test their feelings by noticing if their 'postural echo' mirrors your own.

In our next issue we will look more at the different levels of mirroring body language.

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