

Let's Talk: Body language

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Visual cue: Erica waving with both hands with big smile.

Hi! Did you know that communication is more than just the words that you say? It's also your body language. My name is Erica. Let's talk about body language.

So, let's start off by defining body language. It's really anything that's not the words that you're saying or that you're typing. It includes the way you stand, the way you hold your body, your facial expressions, your gestures, even your tone of voice. Now, understanding body language is really important because it can help you reinforce your message, it can help you understand when you're contradicting your message, and it can help you understand others.

Be aware

So, the first tip is just simply to pay attention to body language. Pay attention to your body language, pay attention to other peoples' body language, and look for the whole message. Look for how body language and what people are saying can either match or mismatch. And you can look for simple things like what does the person's facial expression tell you? What does their body tell you? When I was in graduate school, they taught us, you know what, you probably shouldn't sit like this because it can look like you're not very friendly or like people won't want to tell you things.

Visual cue: Erica with arms crossed tightly.

Instead using open body language, opening up your arms, putting them next to you, makes you look like you're really paying attention and you're a much friendlier person.

Visual cue: Erica sitting with arms on the chair rest in an open manner.

Mixed messages

Tip number two is to remember just how confusing body language can be. It's a little bit like learning to speak a different language. You can easily misread messages, so you always want to make sure that you're checking out any kind of confusing messages you're getting from somebody when it comes to body language.

Confirm what you see

So, how do you call out confusing messages? It's really, simply a matter of taking in the information from the whole message, based on what the person's saying and what they're doing, and then asking a follow up question. You may or may not want to describe what they're doing. So, for example, if you ask somebody how they're doing and they're like, "I'm fine, I'm fine."

Visual cue: Erica saying "I'm fine. I'm fine." while rubbing her head and frowning.

Their body language isn't saying that they're fine even though their words are, so you might say, "Well, you don't look like you're feeling fine. You're rubbing your head; you seem kind of distressed." Maybe you see somebody check their watch. You can say, "Oh, you're checking your watch. Do you have somewhere to be?" Just say what it is that you're noticing and ask a follow up question.

Digital expressions

So, the next tip is to remember that body language matters in digital communication, too. Now, because digital communication involves so much writing and you don't sit face-to-face with somebody, there are a lot of opportunities for misunderstanding, so when appropriate, you can include things like emojis or movable GIFs to help you convey your message. And always remember that writing in all caps is basically the same thing as yelling.

Check yourself out

And here's another tip for body language. Most of us have little habits and little ticks that we don't even know about, so it can be helpful to do things like role play in front of somebody and get feedback on how you stand and how you're using your body language, or even videotape yourself and then play it back. You'll be surprised what you learn about yourself and how you are using your own body language.

Be mindful of body language

So, in summary, remember that body language is an important part of communication. Pay attention to your body language, pay attention to other peoples' body language. Before you know it, you'll be an expert communicator.

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