



BODY TALK



» Body language | *By Suzanne Masefield*



Did you know that within five minutes of meeting someone, we decide whether we like, dislike, trust, or distrust them? Suzanne Masefield explains

{ Just as we create a perception of others moments after we're first introduced, so do they read us, determining our credibility and whether they feel confident enough to form a relationship or do business with us. This is all determined through subtle conscious and unconscious non-verbal messages – body language.

So, communicating powerfully and authentically is pivotal to friendships and career success. This is backed up by research showing that at least 55 percent of our communication is delivered via body language. Our tone of voice accounts for another 38 percent, while only 7 percent of how we come across is a result of the actual words we speak. Recent studies even suggest that, in some situations, our body language can be responsible for as much as 80-90 percent of how positively or negatively we present to others.

It's hardly surprising, then, that using your body language effectively can be an enormous advantage, personally and professionally. This is my message when clients ask me what is holding them back. Too often, they don't

realise how they come across to others. They are unaware that they shrink back, look nervous, or perhaps come across as pushy, aggressive, or negative.

Strong, positive body language starts in childhood, when our parents teach us how to shake hands and make eye contact. Likewise, overcoming shy tendencies increases our chance of positive results, whether it's finally daring to ask for a raise, applying for a new job, or admitting we are over-worked and assertively standing up for ourselves.

Good leaders, for example, adopt the natural body language of a director. They maintain an upright, open stance, looking down slightly, smiling less, and carrying a strong sense of being in charge of themselves. They use a more dominant stance to create presence.

To the same end, adapting our voice tone is a valuable technique used frequently by politicians and leaders. Women are taught to lower their tone and speak more slowly. Depth of voice relates to body size, so a lower, slower tone is unconsciously heard as more dominant and authoritative, and commands greater respect. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that studies show that the

▶ *SMILE with all your face, not just your mouth. A genuine warm welcome will light up your expression and let people know that you are open to engaging positively with them.*

pitch of a woman's voice becomes more masculine as they become more senior. By lowering their tone, strengthening their posture, centering their emotions and grounding their body, women can reflect strong leadership qualities without forgoing their positive female attributes.

7 DEADLY HABITS TO AVOID:

- Slouching.
- Crossing your arms.
- Speaking too fast.
- Fiddling with your hair.
- Stroking your neck or arms.
- Fidgeting or foot-tapping.
- Wringing your hands.



One of the easiest ways to get on someone's good side is to reflect their body language and speech patterns. Basically, we prefer people who are like us and behave similarly. This is called mirroring and it's quick to learn. Practise on friends and colleagues, concentrating on posture, speech patterns, tone, and other non-verbal indications such as breathing. Give it a go in the work environment and notice how the rapport you create with others changes. However, be subtle. Don't go overboard. Mirror positive, friendly body language without being intrusive or overly intimate – reflecting negative postures can be counter-productive.

Cultural awareness is an essential aspect of body language in today's multi-cultural society. Sensitivity to gestures that may differ considerably between nationalities will help you to communicate effectively and avoid a major faux pas that can be upsetting for everyone. Eye contact is a great example of this – it is prized in most Western cultures, yet is seen as invasive or aggressive, in certain situations, in Eastern cultures. So, before you go overseas or interact with someone from another culture, find out about the etiquette and positive gestures associated with their country. And if you are unsure how to behave in certain professional situations, observe first and then mirror the body language of your host to create a good impression.



S SMILE

O OPEN POSTURE

F FORWARD LEAN

T TOUCH

E EYE CONTACT

N NOTICE



Here is another simple technique that enables people to feel empowered in such situations and lets them come across in a confident, positive manner that encourages others to feel at ease. I call this 'SOFTEN'.

SMILE with all your face, not just your mouth. A genuine warm welcome will light up your expression and let people know that you are open to engaging positively with them.

OPEN your body posture. Stand tall, with your head up, your shoulders back, your chest out and your stomach in. Relax your breathing, bend your knees, and move your arms about 15cm from your body to create space along your sides. Use your hands more confidently, held no more than an elbow's width from your body and with your fingers together.

FORWARD LEAN shows the other person that you are open to engaging. Focus on something positive about them.

TOUCH. Put your hand on your stomach and take a deep breath. Calm your mind, centre your emotions, bend your knees and feel your feet on the floor.

EYE CONTACT encourages open communication and builds trust, but be mindful that this is not appropriate in all cultures.

NOTICE how you might look and centre yourself, then notice the other person's body language and respond appropriately. Give a small nod, if appropriate, to acknowledge them.

Use the **SOFTEN** technique daily to increase your mental, intuitive and physical abilities. Start your day powerfully and positively, and in full charge of your body language. It will increase your ability to take control of the messages you send to others and allow you to develop more confident body language, creating greater awareness and increasing your ability to build trust and rapport. Maximise this tool as part of your meet-and-greet strategy for more empowered business practice. Become an even greater communicator and create body language that will give you an edge in life. «



SUZANNE MASEFIELD is the director of **Think Success**. She is a preferred coach and course facilitator for many leaders and entrepreneurs, with clients throughout Australasia, the USA and Europe. She is a qualified mind body analyst AIBMA (specialising in body language), clinical hypnotherapist, writer, presenter and executive coach. With more than 18 years' experience as an empowerment facilitator, she inspires authentic leadership worldwide. She works with the security and surveillance teams at Sky City Auckland, along with sales teams, HR, recruitment, hospitality, retail and education clients. Suzanne is co-author of the no. 1 best-selling book *Align, Expand, Succeed*, and recently released *101 Ways to Enhance Your Career*.

For further details on Suzanne's Body Language 4 Success courses, visit **Think Success** at: www.co.nz/body-language.html.