



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Non Verbal Communication in Business Life

Vintean, Adriana

19 November 2007

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/6732/>
MPRA Paper No. 6732, posted 14 Jan 2008 12:48 UTC

Non Verbal Communication in Business Life

Adriana Vintean

“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

Everybody communicates on two levels, namely verbally and non-verbally. Verbal communication, or the spoken words we use, represent a very small portion (less than 10%) of our overall message. People can lie, misrepresent or mislead you with their words. Non-verbal language represents over 50% of our total message. Mastering the language of non verbal communication becomes more and more an art and has an impact on our outcomes. The non-verbal message will always be more a more accurate representation of the person's feelings, attitudes or beliefs.

What do these nonverbal messages tell you? Is the person nervous? Insecure? Bored? Thinking? Happy? Craving attention? A nuisance? Perhaps the messages mean nothing. On the other hand, if nonverbal signs reveal the emotional side of a communication, it is often important for us to try to determine what message is being transmitted along with the verbal one. Sometimes they are the same; other times they are drastically different

An easy way to determine what someone is thinking or feeling is to observe whether their signals are open or closed. Open signals represent openness, acceptance, willingness, enthusiasm, and approval. Closed signals represent the opposite of all of these. Closed signals are crossed legs, arms, hands. A lack of eye contact, rigid posture, leaning away from you, and the hands on top of the head are also examples of closed signals. Open signals are exactly what they imply: open hands, uncrossed legs, eye contact, leaning forward, and so on.

We communicate through gestures, facial expressions, eye movements and eye contact, posture and body position, verbal tone, inflection, pauses, pace and volume. The way people dress also sends a non-verbal signal. Then, silence is also an important communication tool. Most of us find an extended period of silence rather oppressive and

threatening, and we rush to fill the void with words—usually saying more than we mean to say. By using silence at strategic times, you can sometimes get your decoder to reveal certain feelings and attitudes that may be hindering effective communication.

But probably the best-known type of nonverbal communication remains body language.

To be a good reader of body language requires that you sharpen your powers of observation and perception. Whether we are aware of it or not, each of us spends a lot of time decoding body language. We observe a wrinkled forehead, a raised eyebrow, a tug on the ear, fingers tapping on the table top, legs crossed and uncrossed, arms crossed over the chest. These movements should be considered in relation to the message itself; however, many times the nonverbal communications come through louder than the words that are actually being spoken. A favorite sport of many is "people watching." While waiting in an airport terminal, we must have observed the crowd and tried to imagine the occupation, the problems, and the thoughts of various people. Or, observing an individual's dress and trying to conclude something about the person. Or observing gestures, facial expressions, and manner of walking and trying to guess the nature of the topic under discussion...

The most important elements to be taken into consideration are: eye contact, gestures, movement, and posture.

There are messages which can be sent when one thinks of eyes combined with different positions and movements of the eyelids and eyebrows. As with all forms of nonverbal communication, messages sent by the eyes should be decoded in terms of the words accompanying them.

Good eye contact helps your audience develop trust in you, thereby helping you and your message appear credible. Poor eye contact does exactly the opposite.

People rely on visual clues to help them decide on whether to attend to a message or not. If they find that someone isn't 'looking' at them when they are being spoken to, they might feel uneasy. So, it is a wise business communicator who makes a point of attempting to engage every member of the audience by looking at them. This is of course easy if the audience consists of few people, but in an auditorium it can be a much harder task. So, it is advisable to balance our time between the following areas:

- * have a slow scanning of the entire audience,

- *focus on particular areas of our audience (perhaps looking at the wall between two heads if we are still intimidated by public speaking),

- *look at individual members of the audience for some seconds per person.

Looking at individual members of a large group can be 'tricky' to get right at first.

Equally, it can be a fine balancing act if our audience comprises of just one or two members - spend too much time looking them in the eyes and they will feel intimidated, stared at, 'hunted down'.

When focusing on individual members in a large meeting or auditorium, we can try and spread our attention throughout the room. That is, we shouldn't just focus our personal gaze on selected individuals from just one part of the room. Unless we are specifically looking to interact with a particular person at that moment of our presentation, we should select our individual eye-contact audience members from the whole room.

A company's visual vocabulary may consist of the secondary design elements that are used in conjunction with our logo to form your brand identity. The visual vocabulary is composed of font styles, colors, shapes, layout conventions, backgrounds, photographic library, text treatments (such as taglines) and even the type of paper you choose.

These elements should be used consistently throughout your stationery set and marketing collateral and have advantages over use of a logo and text alone:

The elements of our visual vocabulary become a graphic language, which takes our viewer deeper into our graphics and materials. They add visual interest and continue to tell our business's story. They are another way that we can communicate about our business with potential clients and prospects, aside from the actual words and text about our business.

Graphics in a visual vocabulary are a method of communication that's more quickly understood than the text alone. A viewer can absorb the meanings of colors, symbols, photos, shapes and even font types much more quickly than by reading text. So, in cases where time is of the essence – when we are marketing to busy people, creating motion

graphics such as animations or commercials or designing items that people will quickly pass by, such as car graphics or billboards, this is an important consideration.

Many people have a deeper emotional connection with graphics than they do with text. Customers will be more likely to form an emotional bond with the brand and company if more graphics are being used, as opposed to just using our logo and text on a letterhead, business card, datasheet or brochure. Color and photography are two of the most effective visual vocabulary elements to use to affect this emotional brand connection.

We can communicate some of the “personality factors” of our business through our visual vocabulary. We can make our company look more professional or people-oriented, more contemporary or traditional or communicate any of our company’s values by varying the shapes, colors and fonts used as the surrounding visual vocabulary. So, if we choose our vocabulary elements carefully, the story of the personality of our company can be told through such elements.

Using a visual vocabulary consistently throughout all of our corporate materials will automatically make our materials look more coherent, credible and professional, through the repetitive use of consistent elements.

The right combination of visual vocabulary elements can also make our materials more eye-catching. When our materials are in competition with others – in a stack of proposals, on a table with other brochures or even a postcard coming out of a crowded mailbox – they’ll have a better chance of getting noticed when they are designed with stunning and unique visual vocabulary elements.

Most of the viewers better remember visual elements. A visual vocabulary will increase the memorability of our materials as well, since people will have more visual elements to remember in our materials.

Elements of the visual vocabulary can reinforce our logo to help quicken the brand recognition building process. One common way that we do this is to use a large version of the company’s logo, or a portion of the logo, as a watermark on the letterhead, business card, envelope or website. Not only does this vocabulary element effect add visual interest, but it will help to speed the time that it takes for our potential customers and existing clients to recognize and remember our brand.

A visual vocabulary becomes a tool kit from which we can easily pull visual elements to create new marketing materials. If we have a business card and brochure and need to create a post card quickly, then many of our visual elements, such as color scheme, font styles and even layout and photograph choices can be pulled from the existing marketing materials and rearranged to create a new piece. This is especially convenient when we have a short time or low budget to produce new marketing materials.

The bonus function of a visual vocabulary is that when we're doing a special promotion, launching a new product or extending our services or product line, we can vary elements of the visual vocabulary or even develop a new set of visual vocabulary elements, to make the materials for our new promotion stand out. While consistency throughout a campaign is important, the elements of our visual vocabulary aren't as set in stone as our logo. This is especially effective when we work just with the colors and drawn elements and leave the text and tagline treatments the same. That way, our materials will still be partially consistent with the other company materials, but we can give our new product or promotion's materials a voice of its own.

Adding some visual vocabulary elements to our brand identity makes communicating with your audience easier, quicker and more emotionally charged. This gives you a highly effective way to increase your visibility and memorability. When used correctly, they can increase credibility as well. They even can help add some personality to our brand identity and can make future marketing materials easier to develop.

In the business world, dealing with color puts non-verbal communication on a whole new level. We need to be aware of the meanings of different colors, as well as the impression they will convey in a business report, web page, or PowerPoint presentation. It is our job to make sure that the impression is a professional one.

Color should be used only to emphasize key points, group similar items, create a mood, and/or provide continuity. Research has shown that documents in color will be remembered more, read more easily, and appear slightly more important and believable.

The chief concern in using color is legibility, and the chief tool is contrast. The colors chosen should systematically enhance the document by using appropriate color schemes. One color should maintain a consistent meaning throughout the document.

Businesses recommend using dark colors, such as black and navy blue in apparel. For documents, gender-neutral, dark colors are also advocated.

Color	Moods	Symbolic Meaning
Red	Hot, affectionate, angry, defiant, contrary, hostile, full of vitality, calm, tender	Happiness, lust, intimacy, love, restlessness, agitation, royalty, rage, sin, blood
Blue	Cool, pleasant, leisurely, distant, infinite, secure, transcendent, calm, tender	Dignity, sadness, tenderness, truth
Yellow	Unpleasant, exciting, hostile, cheerful, joyful, jovial	Superficial glamour, cowardice, sun, light, wisdom, masculinity, royalty (in China), age (in Greece), prostitution (in Italy), famine (in Egypt)
Orange	Unpleasant, exciting, disturbed, distressed, upset, defiant, contrary, hostile, stimulating	Sun, truthfulness, harvest, thoughtfulness
Purple	Depressed, sad, dignified, stately	Wisdom, victory, pomp, wealth, humility, tragedy
Green	Cool, pleasant, leisurely, in control	Security, peace, jealousy, hate, aggressiveness, calm
Black	Sad, intense, anxiety, fear, despondent, dejected, melancholy, unhappy	Darkness, power, mastery, protection, decay, mystery, wisdom, death, atonement
Brown	Sad, not tender, despondent, dejected, melancholy	Melancholy, protection, autumn, decay, humility, atonement
White	Joy, lightness, neutral, cold	Solemnity, purity, femininity, humility, joy, light, innocence, fidelity, cowardice

Color guidelines for brands:

Red evokes aggressiveness, passion, strength, vitality. In business, it is great for accents and boldness, stimulates appetites, is associated with debt.

Pink evokes femininity, innocence, softness, health. In business, be sure you're aware of its feminine implications and associations.

Orange evokes fun, cheeriness, warm exuberance. In business, it's great to highlight information in graphs and on charts evokes positivity, sunshine and cowardice. In business, it appeals to intellectuals and is excellent for accenting things. Too much is

unnerving.

Green evokes tranquility, health, freshness. In business, its deep tones convey status and wealth; its pale tones are soothing.

Blue evokes authority, dignity, security, faithfulness. In business, it implies fiscal responsibility and security. Plus it is universally popular.

Yellow is an optimistic color that almost always evokes a positive response. Yellow gets you motivated; it stimulates creative and intellectual energy; it's cheerful and easygoing.

Purple evokes sophistication, spirituality, costliness, royalty and mystery. In business, it's right for upscale and artistic audiences.

Brown evokes utility, earthiness, woodiness and subtle richness. In business, it signifies less important items in documents.

White evokes purity, truthfulness, being contemporary and refined. In business, it enlivens dark colors and can be refreshing or sterile.

Gray evokes somberness, authority, practicality and a corporate mentality. In business, it is always right for conservative audiences.

Black evokes seriousness, distinctiveness, boldness and being classic. In business, it creates drama and is often a fine background color.

Most of us, when talking with persons, use our hands and face to help us describe an event or object or just discuss.

Some people punctuate communications with such extravagant gestures that it is extremely dangerous to get too close to their nonverbal exclamations.

We wave our arms about, turn our hands this way and that, roll our eyes, raise our eyebrows, and smile or frown.

Our audience of friends is no different from our business audience — they rely on our face and hands. It is totally understandable that our nervousness can cause us to 'freeze up', but it is in our and our communication's best interests if we manage that nervousness, manage our fear of public speaking, and use our body to help emphasize our point.

Then, as part of man's genetic heritage we are programmed to pay attention to movement. We instantly notice it, whether we want to or not, assessing the movement for

any hint of a threat to us. There is nervous movement and this can be transmitted to the audience and therefore the message is being diluted. In a sales presentation, in sales support, in delivering goods, in market survey, in brokerage.

With respect to the posture we consider the first type of 'posture' as the one we think of intuitively—the straight back versus the slumped shoulders; the feet-apart confident stance versus the feet together, hand-wringing of the nervous; the head up and smiling versus the head down and frowning. And every one of the positions we place the various elements of our body in tells a story—a powerful, nonverbal story.

For example, stand upright, shoulders straight, head up and eyes facing the front. Wear a big smile. Notice how you 'feel' emotionally.

Now-slump your shoulders, look at the floor and slightly shuffle your feet. Again, take a note of your emotional state.

A strong, upright, positive body posture not only helps you breathe easier (good for helping to calm nerves!) but also transmits a message of authority, confidence, trust and power.

The second type of 'posture' comes from our internal mental and emotional states.

You can have great body posture but without internal mental and emotional posture your words will sound hollow to your audience.

For example, the used car salesman at 'Brothers Motors' might have great body posture and greet you with a firm handshake, a steady gaze and a friendly smile. But if in his heart he is seeing you as just another sucker then sooner or later his internal conflict between what he says and what he really thinks will cause him to 'trip up'.

His body will start betraying his real, underlying intentions and you'll start to feel uncomfortable around him, even if you can't figure out why.

But, if that same used car salesman had a genuine desire to help you find the right car for you, and he puts your needs before his own, then his words and actions will remain congruent with his underlying intentions and you will trust him, even though you might not be able to identify why.

We meet salesmen and women who don't actually make the money they claim to make in their 'fabulous business opportunity', and while their words are practiced and polished, and their body posture is 'perfect', their words come like honeyed poison from their lips and we remain unconvinced.

This second type of 'posture' is fundamentally tied to truth and honesty. It is about 'walking the talk' and being who you say you are.

It's about not trying to sell something you don't believe in or use yourself. It's about not trying to pass yourself off as an expert when all you've ever done is read a book on the subject.

It's all about making sure that your words and your intentions are underpinned by truth and honesty. Because all of us, no matter how polished a presenter we might be, are at the mercy of our body and its ability to 'tell the truth' in spite of what our lips might utter.

In conclusion the following tips are to be taken into consideration:

1. Human communication means to make sense out of the world and to share it with the others.
2. Non verbal messages will always be more accurately representing our feelings, attitudes and beliefs.
3. The non verbal communication is not always the whole story.
4. Commit to being a lifelong learner about how to read non-verbal signs or body language. Remember that people can and do communicate information in numerous ways.
5. Ask questions about body language to clear up confusion about the other person's nonverbal signs.
6. Learn to use your body language to be more effective in your communications.
7. Learn to view some gestures as a group of signals, rather than as an individual signal to make sure you are not placing too much emphasis on a single gesture.
8. Non verbal language represents more than 50% of our total messages.

9. Non verbal communication is meant to be anything else than words themselves that communicates or affects the message which is being contained in the words.

10. In business life non verbal communication can make us successful or on the contrary can disappoint us.

References

1. Branden, Nathaniel. *How To Raise Your Self-Esteem*. Bantam: 1988.
2. Buckingham, Marcus & Curt Coffman. *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. Simon and Schuster: 1999.
3. Delisser, Peter. *Be Your Own Executive Coach: Master High-Impact Communications Skills for Dealing With Difficult People, Improving Your Personal Image, Learning How to Listen, Solving Business pr.* Chandler House Press: 1999
4. *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, <http://www.cios.org/www/ejcrec2.htm>