

THE NON-VERBAL ADVANTAGE

Each emotion has unique, identifiable signals that you can decode and capitalise on, writes **Eugene Yiga**



WHAT IMPRESSION AM I MAKING? SHOULD I BELIEVE WHAT MY BOSS TOLD ME? AM I DEALING WITH A POTENTIAL BUYER OR JUST WASTING MY TIME? DID MY TEAM UNDERSTAND WHAT I SAID? WHAT DID THE CUSTOMER MEAN BY THAT? HOW DO I KNOW IF HE SUPPORTS MY IDEA? IS THE AUDIENCE ANGRY, FRUSTRATED, INTERESTED, OR BORED?

These are questions Carol Kinsey Goman asks in *The Nonverbal Advantage*, a book that offers a practical guide to understanding the secrets and science of body language at work. Her view is that by paying attention to body movements and noticing when someone changes between them, you can understand their shifting mood. '[People] in professional settings are constantly telling each other exactly what they think and feel,' she says. 'And it often has nothing to do with the words they speak.'



THE EYES HAVE IT

Because we give and receive more messages from the eyes than any other part of the body, making and keeping healthy eye contact (without staring) is the first step. 'Eye contact is so powerful because it's instinctive and connected with humans' early survival patterns,' says Carol. 'Children who could attract and maintain eye contact, and therefore increase attention, had the best chance of being fed and cared for,' she adds. Just as innate are our facial expressions, which stem from six universal expressions: joy, sadness, surprise, fear, contempt/disgust, and anger. 'Human beings can send and receive facial signals with lightning speed and over great distances,' she says. 'But [facial expressions] don't reveal what's generating a particular emotion; only that the emotion is occurring. Even as you increase your accuracy in picking up non-verbal signals (and you'll be a lot better off being aware of these cues than oblivious to them) you'll always have to dig a little to uncover the exact motivation behind the expression.'



IN YOUR FACE

The face is the only system that tells us a specific emotion is occurring. For example, a head tilt could be seen as an act of submission while disagreement might be read from pursed lips. It's even more apparent with hand and arm movements, where rubbing your nose, eyes, or ears could indicate discomfort in contrast to 'steeple' gestures (hands together, fingers interlocked, index fingers raised and touching at the tips or palms separated slightly, fingers of both hands spread, and fingertips touching) that show confidence.

According to Carol, hand and arm gestures are not only connected to speech but may be our oldest method of communication. 'Researchers now believe that early humans communicated using a form of mime. Somewhere in our evolutionary history, speech took over from gesture as the main form of communication, but gesture and speech are so tightly connected that we can't do one without the other.'

The key is to keep your body as open as possible. Instead of wringing your hands or crossing your arms (the ultimate closed gesture), keep them relaxed. Also avoid fidgeting, shuffling, or winding your feet around each other (especially in an ankle lock). Instead, stand with legs apart, feet firmly planted, and with weight evenly distributed to show that you're well balanced. If you have to sit, cross your ankle on your knee to stay open.

'Our feet turn away from things we want to avoid and point in the direction we'd prefer to be going,' she says. 'In general, open or uncrossed leg positions show an open or dominant attitude, whereas crossed positions are a sign of a closed attitude or uncertainty.'

10 STEPS TO THE PERFECT HANDSHAKE

It's believed that hand gestures as greetings originated in our early prehistory, perhaps to show that no weapons were carried.

Here are Goman's tips for a winning handshake:

- 1. Make sure your right hand is free.**
- 2. Stand up when being introduced and when extending your hand.**
- 3. Keep your body squared off to the other person to face them fully.**
- 4. Look directly into the other person's eyes (perhaps to notice their eye colour) and smile.**
- 5. Offer your hand with your palm facing sideways (palm upward is submissive and palm downward is dominant).**
- 6. Make sure you have palm-to-palm contact and that the web of your hand touches the web of theirs.**
- 7. Shake hands firmly, not like a dead fish but also not like a bone crusher, finger grinder, or with a stiff arm.**
- 8. Hold their hand a few fractions of a second longer than you're inclined to.**
- 9. Start talking before you let go.**
- 10. Keep eye contact when you break away (looking down is a sign of submission).**



THESE LIPS DON'T LIE

The book includes a lot more practical suggestions, including how to make use of your physical space, posture and appropriate touch, in order to communicate effectively in the workplace. But the objective is not to trick or manipulate people. Instead, the non-verbal advantage lies in 'learning how to use body language to enhance sincere messages of candour, caring, and rapport'.

You can sharpen your skills while waiting at the airport, during a business meeting or family dinner, or at a party with your friends, says Carol. 'You'll be amazed at the insights you'll gain into what the body language of others is saying to you – and how much you'll learn about your own non-verbal signals. And when you apply these new insights to your professional relationships, you'll find that the non-verbal advantage becomes a key to business success.' ■

