

Body Language - How to Read Your Prospect Like a Book

By John Boe

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Are you aware that your body language reveals your deepest feelings and hidden thoughts to total strangers? It might surprise you to know research indicates that over 65% of our communication is done nonverbally. In fact, studies show that nonverbal communication has a much greater impact and reliability than the spoken word. Therefore, if your prospect's words are incongruent with their body language gestures, you would be wise to rely on their body language as a more accurate reflection of their true feelings. Body language is a complex mixture of movement, posture, and tone of voice. The good news about this subject is that your subconscious mind already understands the meaning of every gesture, posture and voice inflection. The bad news is without the proper training you are unable to consciously apply this information. Developing a working understanding of body language is similar to learning a foreign language; it requires time and effort to achieve mastery.

As a professional salesperson you must continuously monitor your prospect's body language and adjust your presentation accordingly. Think about the tremendous advantage you would have as a baseball manager if you knew the meaning of the opposing teams signals. For example, suppose you knew in advance that the other team was planning to steal second base. You would have a distinct edge because you would be able to adjust your strategy accordingly. Are you missing your prospect's signals? By understanding your prospect's body language gestures you will minimize perceived sales pressure and know when it is appropriate to close the sale.

Several years ago I read an interesting article about a body language experiment conducted with college students. The researchers divided the students into two groups. The first group of students was asked to maintain an open body posture during the class lecture. They were instructed to keep their heads up, both feet on the floor and their arms unfolded. The second group of students, attending the same class, was instructed to use closed body posture by crossing their legs and folding their arms during the lecture. At the conclusion of the lecture both groups were interviewed and tested. Those students that were asked to maintain a closed body posture scored 38% less in their retention of information and, of equal significance, they had a more critical opinion of both the material and the professor. As a professional speaker, I share a similar challenge with the college professor. As I begin my presentation, I can anticipate that a significant number of the audience will initially display closed body posture. They will have their legs crossed, their arms folded and their heads down. I know that if I am to be effective my primary task is to connect with the audience and get them to adjust their body language into a more receptive posture before real learning can begin.

Here are some important body language gestures you need to become familiar with:

Body Postures: There are two basic categories of body postures; Open/Closed and Forward/Back. In an open and receptive body posture, people have their arms unfolded, legs uncrossed, and their palms exposed. In a closed body posture, arms are folded, legs are crossed and their body is usually turned away.

- Leaning Back and Closed: Indicates a lack of interest.
- Leaning Back and Open: Indicates contemplation and cautious interest.
- Leaning Forward and Closed: Indicates potential aggressive behavior.
- Leaning Forward and Open: Indicates interest and agreement. If appropriate, this would be a good time to ask for the order.

Head Gestures: There are four basic head positions.

- Head Neutral: Indicates a neutral and open attitude.
- Tilted Back: Indicates a superior attitude.
- Tilted Down: Indicates negative and judgmental attitude.
- Tilted to One Side: Indicates interest.

Facial Gestures: Facial gestures are easy to observe but are frequently overlooked due to their subtlety. Facial gestures are vitally important because they reveal deceit, doubt, deliberation, and critical judgment.

- Dilated Pupils: Under normal lighting conditions when a person is excited about something, their pupils will dilate. Conversely, when someone is upset or angry their pupils will contract. For this very reason, professional poker players frequently wear sunglasses. Aristotle Onassis always wore dark sunglasses whenever he negotiated business deals. As a professional salesperson you should not wear sunglasses while you are in front of a prospect. Eye contact is crucial for building trust and rapport.
- Eye Rub: Indicates deceit, "See no evil." When a person rubs their eye they will normally look away from you to avoid eye contact.
- Eye Roll: Is a dismissive gesture that indicates superiority.
- Looking Over Glasses: Indicates scrutiny and a critical attitude.
- Nose Rub: Indicates dislike of the subject at hand.
- Hand or Fingers Blocking Mouth: Indicates deceit, "Speak no evil." When a person uses this blocking gesture while they are speaking they are literally attempting to block or filter their words. If your prospect assumes this gesture while you are speaking, this indicates they are skeptical or doubtful of what you are telling them.
- Glasses to Mouth: Used to stall or delay a decision.
- Chin Stroking: This gesture is used when a person is in the final process of making a decision. When you see this gesture avoid the temptation to interrupt your prospect. If the gestures that follow

chin stoking are positive, and it is appropriate, ask for the order. If the gestures following the chin stroke are negative then you will know there is additional work to be done before you can close the sale.

- Thumb Under Chin/Index Finger Pointing Vertically along the Cheek: Indicates a negative attitude and critical judgment. Do not mistake this gesture for interest because in this case the thumb is under the chin. When you encounter this negative gesture, hand your prospect something to force them to drop their hand away from their face.

Matching and Mirroring: People want to do business with salespeople that they like and trust. You can build trust and rapport by deliberately, but subtly, matching your prospects body language. Matching and mirroring body language gestures is unconscious mimicry. It is a way of unconsciously telling another that you like them and agree with them. For example, if you notice that your prospect is crossing their arms, subtly cross your arms to match them. After you believe you have developed trust and rapport, check it by seeing if they will match you. Uncross your arms and see if your prospect will match and mirror you as you move into a more open posture. If you notice your prospect subconsciously matching your body language gestures, this indicates that you have developed trust and rapport. Conversely, if you notice your prospect mismatching your body language gestures you know trust and rapport has not been established and the sale is in jeopardy.

John Boe, based in Monterey, CA, helps companies recruit, train and motivate top-quality people. To view his online Video Demo or to have John Boe speak at your next event, visit www.johnboe.com or call (831) 375-3668.

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