

Body Language: a Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill

By Lyndsay Swinton

Why do jade dealers wear dark glasses? No this isn't the start to a bad joke, it's a serious question, with a telling answer. Jade dealers, and poker players alike, aim to hide what they're really thinking and saying by suppressing their body language. Unless wheeling and dealing is your game, it'd be wise to master the basic interpersonal communication skill of body language and be better understood.

93% of what you say remains unsaid

How can this be?

Stereotyping is short-hand decision making on whether you like someone and determines how much effort you put into the conversation. Your hair colour, clothes, age, ethnicity and other features that don't change during a conversation, all add up to give an overall impression, which may be good or may be bad. The way you look speaks volumes - it's a communication skill in itself. So, start conveying a favourable message by getting your image right.

If it works for chameleons

Stereotypes can work to your advantage – people who wear glasses are more intelligent right? So wear glasses to an interview. And people who wear revealing clothes are only out to find a mate and can't be taken seriously. (A quick expose - a recent study found that ovulating women expose more flesh than at other times in their cycle!). Learn from chameleons and change your appearance to fit your surroundings and your communication will be taken more seriously.

Eye to Eye Contact

We look less at people who make us uncomfortable. Conversely, when we are truly engaged in a conversation, we make loads of eye contact, making both parties feel

interested and interesting. So, lift your gaze and make eye contact if you want your conversational partner to feel understood.

Okay, I don't mean intense staring – that's just plain scary – fix your gaze on the bridge of the nose and drop your gaze every now and again. If you're talking in a group, remember to include everyone in the conversation by scanning round and making eye contact with everyone.

Mirror and Match

Next time you're out at a restaurant or bar, take a look round and see how people sit when they're in deep, intimate, conversation. Chances are they are sitting in very similar positions – almost as if one were a mirror image of the other, matching posture and position.

To test your rapport building skills, strike up a conversation with a friend or foe, and see if you can mirror and then lead their movements. Take some time to mirror their body language – if they've got crossed legs, make sure your legs are crossed too. If they are bouncing their leg, maybe tap a pencil in time. Above all, be subtle – it's a delicate dance and no-one likes a partner who stomps over their party shoes.

After some time, do a mini assessment. Maybe scratch your nose – if they follow by touching their face in response, you know you've hit the mirroring jackpot. If not, don't worry, just take some more time to build a deeper rapport.

It ain't what you say

In difficult or uncomfortable situations, most people worry about what's going to come out of their mouth. Truth is, get your body language right, and you've mastered the most basic interpersonal communication skill. And the other 7% will take care of itself.

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