

## Reading Body Language

Your own body language reveals your feelings and meanings to others just as other people's body language reveals their feelings and meanings to you. The sending and receiving of body language signals happen on conscious and unconscious levels. Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a noted professor and researcher in the field of non-verbal communication found that:

- 7% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in facial expression.

The breath of all the meanings of non-verbal communication cannot be covered in this short document so we encourage you to pick up a copy of Jan Hargrave's book "***Strictly Business Body Language***". For your convenience we have included a link to Amazon for this and several other books through the **Resource Center** of our website.

Here are a few of the more subtle areas of unspoken communication taken from Jan's book:

**Handshakes** – One of three basic attitudes is communicated through the handshake.

- **Dominance** – Turning the hand so that the palm faces down in the handshake conveys dominance. It does not need to be facing the floor, just downward in relationship to the other person's palm.
- **Submission** – The reverse of the dominant handshake is to offer your hand with the palm facing upward. This can be effective when you want to give the other person control or allow him/her to feel that they are in command of the meeting.
- **Equality** – Hands placed and left in a vertical position during a handshake signal 'equal opportunity' negotiations for both parties involved.

*Note – When two dominant people shake hands a symbolic struggle takes place as each tries to turn the others palm in the submission position. Jan has an excellent narrative on how to counter this without it being obvious to the other person.*

**Communication Channels** - There are only five major non-verbal communication channel. A quick scan of these five channels takes only seconds and should be considered on the whole.

- **Body Angle** – Slight forward body angle indicates a cooperative attitude, leaning back or slightly away from you is sending a negative message. A side to side movement indicates insecurity or doubt while back and forth motions indicate drive and a positive attitude. Too much motion or complete stillness can indicate nervousness or tension.
- **Face** – Increased eye contact signals honesty and interest. Flushed or Tautness can indicate something is wrong, anger, or tenseness. Smiles that are genuine involve the whole face and if other body language signals are positive the message they are sending is that of interest and openness.
- **Arms** – Hanging arms over the back of the chair, and leaning slightly farther away from you indicates a negative reaction, hands behind the head – dominance. Both indicate lack of full attention or acceptance.

## Reading Body Language continued

### Communication Channels

- **Hands** – Research on the hands-clenched position concludes that it is a frustration gesture, signaling that the person doing it is holding back a negative attitude and is somewhat frightened. The gesture has three main positions:
  - Hands clenched in front of the face
  - Hands resting on a desk or on the lap when seated
  - Hands placed in front of the crotch when standing.
- **Legs** – Crossed legs or crossed ankles signal that there is something preventing a completely open mind. A study of 2000 people in the book, “How to Read a Person like a Book” found that no sales were made while participants had their legs crossed. Even if all other channels indicate open and positive attitude, those who keep their legs crossed may have some minor reservation that will prevent a positive outcome unless the reservation is uncovered and answered.

We hope that you find this information helpful and that it gives you a little insight in reading some of those non-verbal messages as you conduct interviews.