

Course: Introduction to Human Communication

Course Completed: Spring 2012

Assignment Title: The Power of Nonverbal Communication

Assignment Project Description: The objective in this assignment was to reflect on the video *Secrets of Body Language*.

Reflection: I selected this paper because nonverbal messages play an important role in message meaning. A nonverbal could entirely change the interpretation of any given message in either a positive or negative way. Nonverbal communication is an important concept to understand and effectively utilize while functioning in organizational settings.



The Power of Nonverbal Communication

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The video on Secrets of Body Language was a powerful insight in exactly how nonverbal communication can influence and impact the message one is attempting to convey. There were several compelling informational pieces but those components that I appreciated most were the fact that more of what we say is interpreted through silent messages our bodies send than through what our words express, the idea that our body language does not exist in isolation but amplifies what is happening emotionally inside already, and that visual disconnects are quite apparent to audiences. Also fascinating was the fact that each body part offers its own emotional view, that politicians and celebrities recognize the power that nonverbal communication holds and hire body language coaches to improve image, and that speeches, conversations, and interrogations are measured against norms for assessing truth and message potential.

Context is crucial when delivering a message than can be seen visually. One researcher cites the importance of body language citing approximately 93% of communication as nonverbal while only 7% of communication is accomplished through actual auditory words. (Although there is contrary research that suggests only 60-80% of all meaning is derived from nonverbal behavior.) The context of the spoken word must be connected to the signals and messages sent by more powerful nonverbal means, otherwise there is a disconnect and the body language may betray the intended message the spoken word is communicating. When speaking, gestures should be delivered seconds before the word is spoken to insure the viewer sees an expression from the heart and evaluates the speaker as credible and the message as truthful.

Politicians first realized that body language was important in 1960 when the Great Debate occurred between Nixon and Kennedy - the first televised debate. Nixon

was just out of the hospital, refused makeup, and was seen sweating. Despite the fact that Nixon won the audio debate but Kennedy was the overwhelming winner from those who had visual access demonstrated the power of visual image to politicians.

Body language plays an enormous role in everyday life since humans communicate primarily through that means and has throughout our evolutionary history. Since body language is automatic and unconscious and can betray the true feelings of the speaker or the listener, care must be taken to assure there is no contradiction between the two. Appropriate nonverbal skill can help one persuade others, establish power, and advance careers. Effective speakers pay attention not only to what they are saying aloud, but to what messages their bodies are silently sending.

Psychological hot spots are the emotional leaks that allow us to detect the discrepancies between what one is saying and what is actually felt or meant. Hot spots are essentially body parts and include: head, face and eyes, shoulders, torso, arms, hands, legs, ankles, feet, and constructions of “personal bubbles.”

Former President Bill Clinton is a master at using appropriate gestures when speaking and are his best visual aids. He uses arm movements that are open and wide, suggesting accessibility and authenticity. He extends hands with palms facing up or out suggesting truthfulness and overlaps hands in front of chest to reinforce intimate statements. He allows his index finger to flow through the air to make points and uses his facial expressions correctly to put words on display. He utilizes a slight, knowing smile, raises his chin to indicate defiance, bites his lip to illustrate frustration, and squints his eyes to communicate determination. Clinton also effectively uses a loosely closed fist with a thumb sticking up to get a point across without appearing aggressive.

Understanding the power and impact of nonverbal communication is vital to effective communication. It can enable the speaker to develop better rapport with an audience and is a dramatic demonstration of visual image potency.