

10-9a Nonverbal Behavior

People put out visual signals based on their body language. Often we are not even aware of doing so. These signals include posture, eye contact, gestures, facial expression, and other factors. An effective salesperson needs to know how to master the subtle cues of body language before he or she can be successful. Visual signals can make you appear not to be in control and will detract from your overall presentation . . . and the sale. Accordingly, salespeople should take care that their nonverbal behavior communicates the proper message—in most instances, confidence, caring, and enthusiasm.²⁴ Table 10-2 defines the nonverbal elements of communicating these three critical attitudes.

It is especially interesting to recognize the leaders personifying these three traits—confidence, caring, and enthusiasm. Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of Great Britain, was renowned for her confidence; she was, in fact, often called the “Iron Lady.” Ronald Reagan managed always to convey caring and empathy with his smile, his personalized examples, metaphors, open gestures, and conversational tone. And, of course, John Kennedy always seemed to exude confidence with his upbeat message, smile, sparkling eyes, expansive gestures, and rapid pace.

Posture

An effective salesperson keeps his head up and hands open.²⁵ Holding your chin raised gives you the aura of being in control. Stand up straight and face your audience head-on. Keep your posture open with arms relaxed and hanging down at your sides. If your hands are clasped firmly in front of you, your feet are crossed, and your body is tight, you are not exactly exuding confidence. Other “don’ts” include hands on hips (you look too condescending or parental); crossed arms (you are not conveying a look that says, “Let’s talk”); hands crossed in front of you (otherwise known as the “fig leaf” stance, which makes you look weak and timid); hands joined behind your back (also known as the “parade rest,” which makes you seem like you have no energy); leaning back in a chair, if seated (you look like you’re ready to pass judgment); and putting your hands in your pockets (this makes you seem nervous and can result in jingling any coins or keys that might be there).

Table 10-2 Communicating the Appropriate Nonverbal Message

	Caring	Enthusiasm	Confidence
Look	Smile, friendly facial expressions Gestures: Extend arms, palms up, touch when greeting Clothing: Warm, low-contrast colors	Smile, sparkling eyes, animated face, big gestures, touch when greeting	Head and eyes up 90 percent of the time, sustained eye contact Gestures: Palms down, steepling Posture: Upright but relaxed, head perpendicular, shoulders parallel
Tone	Conversational, sincere, real voice, warm	Fast pace, punch out key words, expressive, crisp enunciation	Appropriate volume, inflection drops at the ends of phrases, fast pace, crisp enunciation, punch key words, rich pitch
Voice	Use of names, show of appreciation, personalized examples, make the theoretical relevant, listen to audience with ear and eye, recognition of others	Sharing the “dream,” show of appreciation, upbeat, positive words, expressing feelings, giving credit to others	Articulating “vision,” requesting what you want, short statements, action verbs, no qualifiers or fillers, knowledgeable, facts, statistics, quotes from authorities

Gestures

Gestures are an important part of your visual picture. They are reinforcements of the words and ideas you are trying to convey. Gestures include hand, arm, and head movements.

Gestures are particularly important to a credible presentation. Gesturing can make you more relaxed, reinforce your message, and make the presentation more interesting to watch. Rarely do you hear a dynamic speaker who sounds boring, and conversely, rarely do you see a dynamic speaker who stands motionless. Don’t overdo it, while remembering these points:

1. Keep gestures above the waistline. Low gestures are hard to see and imply low demeanor.
2. Open up your arms to the size of the audience. Embrace the audience. Keep your arms between your waist and shoulders.
3. When not using your arms, drop them to the side. Fingertips at thighs are where your arms should be.
4. Avoid quick and jerky motions. They imply nervousness and nothing is worse for credibility. Hold gestures longer than normal for regular conversation to help counter nervousness.
5. Vary gestures. Switch hands, use both hands, or, at times, no hands.
6. Use gestures to reinforce messages. If making three points, for example, hold up three fingers.
7. Keep hands open and fingers together. Avoid pointed fingers and fists that threaten.²⁶
8. Two gestures to avoid are using a pointed finger (this makes you look accusatory, even if that wasn’t your intent) and fist raising (this is hostile or threatening).

Eye Contact

Even if it’s one-on-one, don’t be afraid to make eye contact. When you make eye contact, you are relating to your audience, which will help get your message across and possibly close the sale.

If you make eye contact with someone who quickly looks away, try not to directly look into that person’s eyes again. In some cultures, direct eye contact is inappropriate, and some people just feel uncomfortable. If you are giving a presentation to a group of people, the eye contact should be done in an irregular and unpredictable “Z” formation—looking at one person for three to five seconds and then moving on to the next face.

The possible problems with eye contact are overdoing it and staring. In conjunction with making eye contact, you can nod your head occasionally. This also helps connect with your listener.

Facial Expressions

Be aware of any artificial, unfriendly, or deadpan expressions you may be making. Do you squint, frown, or make strange faces? Once you are aware of any expressions you may make, it will be easier to eliminate them. Practice smiling and looking pleasant. That’s how you want to look when meeting clients or prospects. Some facial expression “don’ts” include arching eyebrows (this makes you seem surprised or questioning); frowning (your moodiness will be the only thing the other person remembers); and grimacing (your prospect will wonder where it hurts).