

Case 4-2

Robert Boyd, salesperson for NRC Corporation, has just received a bid request from the city of Akron, Ohio, for a new computer system. The following conversation occurs when Robert visits the city's data-processing manager:

Robert: Good morning, Mr. Thomas. My name is Robert Boyd. I'm with NRC and I'm here to talk with you about the bid request I just received in the mail.

Data-Processing Manager: Good. What can I tell you?

Robert: Well, first let me say that I'm glad to see the city is going to buy a new system. NRC will do everything possible to comply with your bid request. I must admit, however, that I'm disturbed to see the way the specifications for the system have been established.

DP Manager: What do you mean, Robert?

Robert: It seems to me that the specifications heavily favor BMI. Now, I believe our system is better than theirs, but I don't think your specifications necessarily provide a fair comparison.

DP Manager: Robert, I really don't know what I can do for you.

Robert: Is there a possibility for changing some of the specifications?

DP Manager: I'll be perfectly honest with you, Bob. Our hands are tied on this matter. The data-processing department simply doesn't have the authority to change specifications. By the time we received authorization for a new system, we had to write specifications that fulfilled basic guidelines established elsewhere. The county board and our accounting department had a lot to say about guidelines, especially Art Bigelow, who heads up accounting. You know Art worked with a BMI system for years before he came with us.

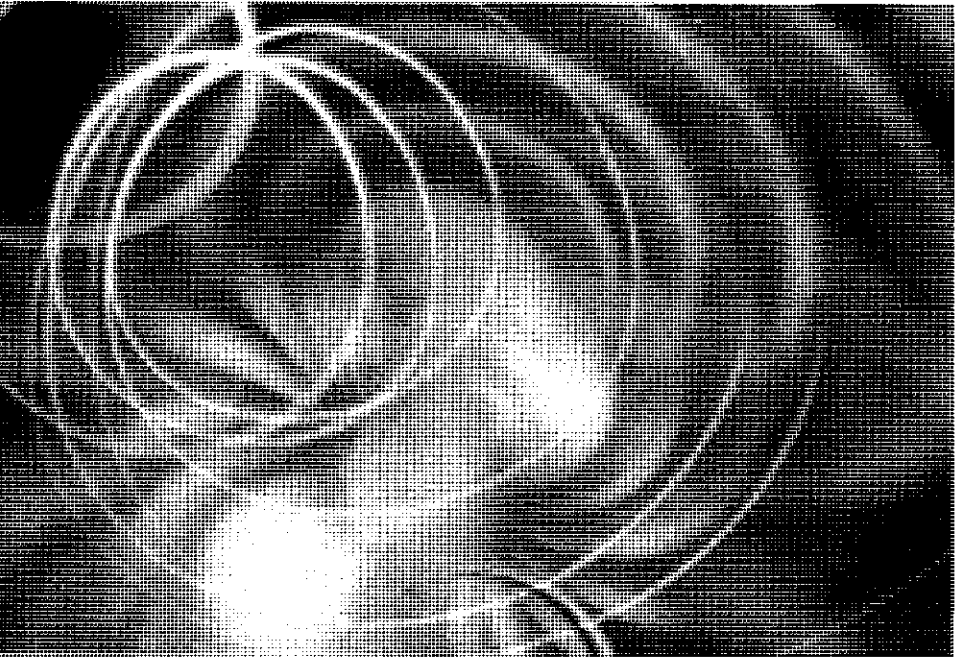
Robert: Well, all right, Mr. Thomas. I guess I'll have to work with what I've got.

Questions

- 1. Explain what happened to Robert.
- 2. What should Robert have been doing prior to the call? Whom should he have called upon?
- 3. Do you believe he has a chance of changing the specifications now?

Chapter 5

Effective Communication



Key Terms

decode message
encode noise
feedback nonverbal communication

pacing
proxemics
source

Chapter

5

Outline

- 5-1 The Communication Process
 - 5-1a Sending Messages Effectively
 - 5-1b Two-Way Communication
 - 5-1c The Importance of Active Listening
- 5-2 Nonverbal Communication
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- 5-3 Dress As a Form of Communication
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- 5-4 Time and Space "Speak"
- 5-5 Vocal Intonation
- 5-6 A Final Word

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

After studying Chapter 5, you will understand:

- The elements of the communication process
- The importance of two-way communication to successful selling
- How dress affects the credibility of salespeople
- The importance of listening to successful selling
- The major elements of nonverbal communication

Several times, we have emphasized that building a relationship with a customer is critical to long-term sales. If so, the cornerstone of this relationship is mutual trust. Continuing sales depends on how well or how poorly the relationship is managed by the seller, with future marketing success contingent upon the development of an in-depth account relationship based upon mutual trust. Research has demonstrated that trust in the buyer-seller relationship depends on five selling behaviors:¹

1. Candor (truth of words)
2. Dependability (predictability of actions)
3. Competence (ability/knowledge/resources)
4. Intent (or empathy; placing the customer's interests on par with the seller's; a commitment to be there, be responsive, etc.)
5. Likability (though emotional and difficult to clearly define, a perception of commonality by both parties)

Examined in detail, these five aspects of trust all involve communication, verbal and nonverbal. As already indicated, candor is established with words (and follow-up actions). Dependability means fulfilling prior verbal promises. To establish competence, the salesperson must demonstrate his or her technical command of products and applications (i.e., accurate, complete, and objective). Intent, or empathy, means that the salesperson understands buyer needs and equates them with his or her own. Likability is validated with courtesy and politeness, commonality of interest, and positive emotional feelings.

Unless salespeople can communicate the superiority of their product or service to potential buyers, the product will remain unsold. To persuade prospective customers of this superiority, salespeople must be able to identify accurately the needs and wants of customers. Salespeople must listen closely to what customers have to say, analyze their spoken words, and be attentive to their nonverbal behavior. Customers' eyes, gestures, vocal intonations, and overall appearance will reveal much about their thoughts. Salespeople must take their impressions of these verbal and nonverbal expressions and structure communication that relates the critical product features that satisfy customer desires. In short, salespeople must be effective communicators. They must be able to formulate their thoughts and ideas so that others can understand them. Moreover, they must be adept at analyzing and understanding what customers are saying to them, as well as their own communication, verbal and nonverbal.

5-1 The Communication Process

The development of communication skills requires, first, that one have an understanding of how communication takes place. Figure 5-1 diagrams the communication process.

As depicted, communication begins with a **source** or initiator. For our purposes, the source will be a salesperson, but it could just as well be the announcer in a television commercial. The source has certain thoughts and ideas in mind to communicate to the receiver. To accomplish this, the message (sales presentation) must first be **encoded** into a form that can be transmitted to the receiver. This involves transplanting ideas into symbols—words, pictures, and numbers—that represent the ideas. In this book, for example, I have used words and figures to transmit my ideas to you, the receiver. It is important that the source use words and symbols that have the same meaning to the receiver. This notion goes beyond mere semantics. Think of the computer salesperson who says to the prospect, "You should install our new zip drive with its 29-millisecond seek time, 100 megabyte storage and removable disk, which will reduce total system overhead devoted to backing up the hard drive." You must use words and symbols that the consumer will be familiar with and understand. You may impress people with a big word, but you will seldom sell them anything.

Besides avoiding big, confusing words, salespeople also should avoid the use of abstract rather than concrete words. For example, it is much more clear if the sales representative says, "This unit copies 100 documents per minute," rather than "This unit copies fast." It also is a good idea to describe things in the active voice instead of the passive voice. "She bought that car without driving it" sounds much stronger than "That car was bought by someone who had not driven it." One final and important point to remember is that seemingly synonymous words evoke far different emotional reactions. In the minds of buyers, there is a vast difference between *boat* and *yacht*. In real estate, salespeople sell *homes*, not *houses*. The former brings to mind images of the family sitting around the fireplace; the latter does not. Similarly, *cellar* is out and *basement* is in; *basement* suggests a paneled family room, while *cellar* is where vegetables are kept. Good salespeople don't use the term *development*, preferring *area of new homes*. And when discussing financing, *initial investment* is substituted for *down payment*.

Once ideas are encoded into words, the **message** is transmitted to the receiver. This may occur by voice waves carried through the air, by various forms of writing, or by electronic media such as television, radio, or Internet. The importance of nonverbal communication, however, must not be overlooked. Such forms of expression as dress, body movement, voice intonations, and sounds of laughter or surprise all enter into the communication process.

source

The initiator of communication who has certain thoughts and ideas in mind to communicate.

encode

Translating ideas into symbols—words, pictures, and numbers—that represent the ideas to a receiver.

message

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, that is transmitted from source to receiver.

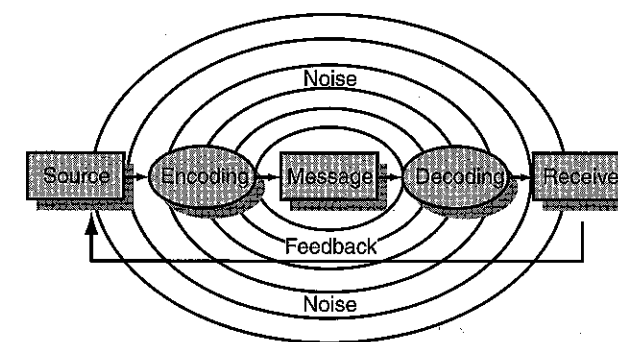


Figure 5-1
The Communication Process

noise

Any unneeded factor that interferes with transmission and reception of a message.

decode

To translate a message from source to receiver in ideas.

feedback

Communication to determine if the receiver understands the message as sent by the source.

The accuracy of communication is affected greatly by the amount of noise that occurs during transmission of the message. **Noise** refers to any unneeded factor that interferes with transmission and reception of the message. In personal selling, noise can consist of interference from ringing telephones and clattering printers or interruptions by secretaries, subordinates, and other workers. These are all physical distractions. Mental distractions are mental side trips, preoccupations, and fantasies. Factual distractions occur when one gets so preoccupied with individual facts that they miss the main point. Semantic distractions occur when we overrespond to an emotional-laden word or concept. Just think, for example, of the distinction between *welfare* and *aid to dependent children*. For which are you in favor of cutting government expenditures? Then, there are factors within ourselves that interfere with effective listening—self-focus, defensiveness, experiential superiority, and egocentrism. Self-focus is a preoccupation with thoughts about ourselves; more positive feelings about oneself and others are required for effective listening. Defensiveness usually results from one's feeling threatened, generally because of negative feedback. People who have lived through a variety of experiences manifest experiential superiority over those with less, failing to listen to the latter. Egocentrism is self-focus carried to an extreme; it is the tendency to view the self as the center of every activity.

For effective communication, the content of the message as **decoded** by the receiver must be identical to that transmitted by the source. This does not always occur. The receiver may have difficulty comprehending the message because of noise or because of preoccupation with other matters. The receiver may also engage in selective perception. This phenomenon has been extensively researched in the social sciences. Basically, it means that people will pay more attention to a message with which they agree than to one with which they disagree. Also, people will tend to interpret a message in keeping with their own beliefs, attitudes, and past experiences. What implications does this have for salespeople?

The salesperson must always be sensitive to selective perception. People not only interpret things in terms of their existing attitudes but they also sometimes fail to notice information in opposition to their existing beliefs. Although salespeople may think they have given a good presentation of a superior product, they may ultimately lose the sale. Selective perception may have influenced the outcome in two ways. First, prospects may have tuned out relevant portions of the presentation because they disagreed with them. Second, prospects may reinterpret the presentation to conform to their own beliefs. For example, when a salesperson says, "This Savin is the finest copier money can buy," a prospect favoring Xerox machines may take this to mean that the Savin is expensive, maybe too expensive.

The last element of the communication process is **feedback**. It is vital that the source know if the receiver is getting the message. As we have seen, there is no guarantee that the message sent is identical to the message received. A question from the receiver, a frown, or even no reaction at all may indicate that the source should modify the message and try again. With feedback, understanding is more likely to occur; without it, there may be no understanding at all. In other words, communication is a two-way process.

5-1a Sending Messages Effectively

1. *Clearly "own" your messages by using first-person singular pronouns ("I," "my").* Personal ownership includes clearly taking responsibility for the ideas and feelings that one expresses. People disown their messages when they use phrases such as "most people," "some of our friends," and "our group." Such

language makes it difficult for listeners to tell whether the individuals really think and feel what they are saying or whether they are repeating the thoughts and feelings of others.

2. *Make your messages complete and specific.* Include clear statements of all necessary information the receiver needs to comprehend the message. Being complete and specific seems too obvious, but often people do not communicate the frame of reference they are using, the assumptions they are making, the intentions they have in communicating, or the leaps in thinking they are making. If you are selling digital cameras, should you assume that the customers know what *megapixels* are? Do they understand why they need more? Do they know the difference between *optical zoom* and *digital zoom*? Don't make untested assumptions about the sophistication of the customer.
3. *Make your verbal and nonverbal messages congruent.* Every face-to-face communication involves both verbal and nonverbal messages. Usually these messages are congruent: The person who is saying that he appreciates your help is smiling and expressing warmth in other nonverbal ways. Communication problems arise when a person's verbal and nonverbal messages are contradictory. If a person says, "Here is some information that may be of help to you" with a sneer on her face and a mocking tone of voice, the meaning you receive is confused by the two different messages being sent.
4. *Be redundant.* Sending the same message more than once and using more than one channel of communication (such as pictures and written messages as well as verbal and nonverbal cues) will help the receiver understand your messages. However, while keeping the message the same, change the context. The Miller Lite commercials are a good example; "Tastes Great, Less Filling" is always the message, but the environment (e.g., beach or home party) of the ad changes. In this manner, one does not offend the receiver.
5. *Ask for feedback concerning the way your messages are being received.* To communicate effectively, you must be aware of how the receiver is interpreting and processing your messages. The only way to be sure is to continually seek feedback as to what meanings the receiver is attaching to your messages. For example, periodically ask, "Am I making sense?"
6. *Make the message appropriate to the receiver's frame of reference.* Explain the same information differently to an expert in the field and to a novice, to a child and to an adult, to your boss and to a coworker.
7. *Describe your feelings by name, action, or figure of speech.* When communicating your feelings, it is especially important to be descriptive. You may describe your feelings by name ("I feel sad"), by actions ("I feel like crying"), or by figures of speech ("I feel down in the dumps"). Description will help communicate your feelings clearly and unambiguously.
8. *Describe others' behavior without evaluating or interpreting it.* When reacting to the behavior of others, be sure to describe their behavior ("You keep interrupting me") rather than evaluating it ("You're a rotten, self-centered egotist who won't listen to anyone else's ideas").²

5-1b Two-Way Communication

A little story might help make the point here: Imagine you sell photocopiers and that the secretary of a prospect calls saying her boss needs to buy a copier and wants to see one that afternoon. You skip lunch, load your top-of-the-line model into

your car, and drive 50 miles to make the presentation. You arrive early to ensure you have plenty of time to set up because your product does everything—runs colors, collates thousands of pages, handles two-sided copies with ease and speed. You're confident the prospect will be wowed. So far, so good. However, the prospect walks in, takes one look at the machine, and says he doesn't need such an advanced model. "We never do colors and we don't have any use for collating," the prospect tells the rep. "What I want is a machine that will give me top-quality prints of single pages and spit them out in a hurry." And that was that. The rep never even got a chance to give his presentation. The salesperson said he could be back the next morning with the right machine, but the prospect said he was going out of town that night and suggested the rep call the following week to set up an appointment. When the rep did so, he learned the prospect had bought a competitor's inferior product for a higher price than the top-of-the-line model he'd just rejected—all because the rep failed to ask a few basic questions before hitting the road to give his presentation.³

Some theories of selling and many practicing salespeople, as well, put great emphasis on dominating the prospective customer. Their idea of selling stresses one-way communication—from the sales representative to the prospect, with little or no feedback. The objective of one-way communication is to dominate prospects verbally so that they are compelled to buy the product by the overwhelming weight of the salesperson's argument. One-way communication views customers as passive, unthinking, and easily manipulated by salespeople. Some companies have adopted this theory of selling, even going to the point of having their sales representatives memorize a canned sales talk that every customer receives regardless of the individual situation. They believe that certain key words and phrases will compel the prospect to buy; accordingly, the entire sales force commits the words to memory.

The fact of the matter, as we saw, is that effective communication involves two-way interaction. Without feedback from the receiver, one cannot even be sure that the message received is the same as the one transmitted. Moreover, according to the marketing concept, the goal of marketing is to satisfy consumer needs and wants. Without two-way communication, it is doubtful whether these needs and wants can be identified. Two-way communication provides the opportunity for continuous feedback, allowing salespeople to determine their progress and to identify those points in the presentation that require further emphasis or explanation. Communication is more accurate because the sender can better determine if the message is getting across to the receiver.

Two-way communication is advantageous from another standpoint. We know that we seldom enjoy being talked to without a chance to answer. How do you feel when someone attempts to control the conversation, jumping into the middle of your sentences without regard to what you are trying to say? One-way communication is anything but ego-gratifying to the customer. The fact of the matter is that the more people participate in a discussion, the more likely they are to convince themselves. If the salesperson asks the right questions and allows customer participation, many times customers sell themselves on the product.

5-1c The Importance of Active Listening

The popular stereotype of the salesperson is that of the glib talker. Certainly many salespeople seem susceptible to the disease of talking too much. Someone once commented that salespeople seem to have been vaccinated with a phonograph needle.

Whether or not this is true, the drive and ego strength that impel one to make sales calls also tend to make salespeople talk at length about their product and company. To perform effectively, however, salespeople must obtain information from their customers about their specific situations. Does the customer have a need for the product or service? If so, will alterations have to be made? Can they afford it? The easiest way of gathering these facts is by listening closely to what the customer has to say. Yet, as Figure 5-2 indicates, both salespeople and buyers alike believe sales reps talk too much. Although the figure dates from 1994, recent material supports the same tendencies.⁴

Despite its importance, most individuals, including salespeople, are inefficient listeners. Tests have shown that immediately after listening to a 10-minute oral presentation, the average listener has heard, understood, properly evaluated, and retained approximately half of what was said. Within 48 hours, that drops off another 50 percent to a final 25 percent level of effectiveness. To summarize, we comprehend and retain only one-fourth of what is said.⁵ This is in spite of the fact that of all our communicative skills, listening is used the most—more than speaking, reading, and writing. How good are you? In the "Web Exercise" section at the end of this chapter, you'll find an exercise that helps you assess your own communication skills.

Perhaps the major reason we are such poor listeners is the prevailing attitude that listening is passive—that persuasion requires forceful speaking. We seem to believe that speaking is power; that is, our speaking has the ability to persuade the other to our point of view without question. Whenever we describe someone who ought to take sales as a career, we say they have the "gift of gab." In fact, the listener has more power, for he or she understands not only what they know, but also what the speaker knows. Watch what happens if one party to a conversation continues to speak; eventually, the speaker is the one who becomes uncomfortable, because what he or she knows of the other party is necessarily limited. Moreover, listening conveys a powerful message to the speaker: "I'm interested in what you say and in you as a person. I think you're worth listening to. I may not always agree with you, but I respect your right to express your views."

How does one become an active listener? By careful practice, as with all other sales skills. One must conscientiously apply oneself to listen to what others have to say. Research has shown that effective listening is hard work. Increased heart action, faster circulation of blood, and even a slightly increased body temperature are characteristics of active listening. Salespeople must make a commitment to practice this skill. Table 5-1 shows a few other suggestions on how to become an active listener.

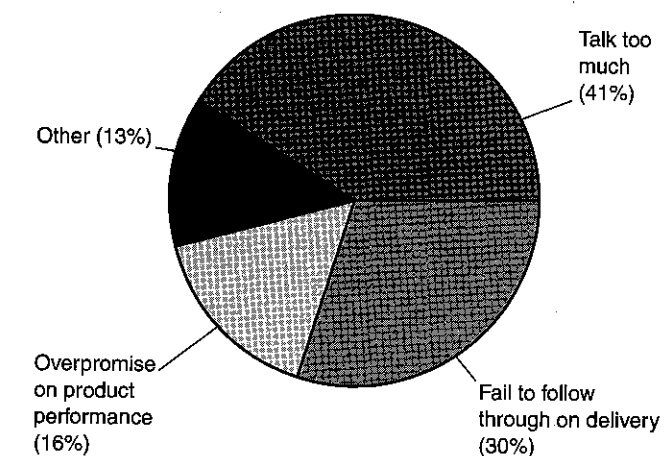


Figure 5-2
The Number One Problem of Salespeople

Source: Adapted from "Seventh Annual Communication Survey," Communispond, Inc., 1994.

Table 5-1 Suggestions for Active Listening

Watch for nonverbal behavior.	Do not listen to only the words themselves; also watch carefully for cues about the speaker's real intentions. Buyers may say "no!" but if they are smiling, sitting with a relaxed body posture and open hands, or if they continue to study and look at the salesperson's samples, the contrary may well be true.	One step up from reflecting on the implication is responding to the feeling, or empathizing with another person. It means putting yourself in their shoes and really feeling how they must feel. To respond to the feeling, all you have to do is put some version of the word <i>feel</i> in your response. That includes the forms of <i>found</i> and <i>felt</i> . Examples of this technique in response to a customer who tells you about being billed incorrectly are as follows: "You must feel frustrated having to correct this situation." ¹⁴ "We at XXXXX feel frustrated as well."
Reject the attitude that speech equals power.	Our mental ability creates another major problem with listening. It is known as the <i>interaction rate</i> . Consider the following: • We can speak at the rate of 125 to 150 words per minute. • We can listen at between 275 and 300 words per minute. • We can think at more than 3,000 words per minute. These figures show that we can listen at three times the rate most people can speak, and we process words at almost 20 times the rate most can speak. Therefore, your mind can race ahead and wander while someone else speaks. We can plan our day and contemplate what we will do after work and still get the gist of what someone is saying. But while our minds wander, we miss much of what we are capable of capturing.	Don't interrupt. Above all, when customers want to talk, shut up and listen. Never be so involved in what you are going to say next that you cut them off, jumping into the middle of a sentence. How do you feel when someone interrupts you? Don't you feel like saying, "Please, let me finish!" As a professional salesperson, you should never have occasion to hear this. ^{8,9}
Be sensitive to personal pronouns (e.g., "I," "we").	Practice being interested in what others have to say. You are not always the most interesting one around. Become sensitive to the prospect's use of personal pronouns, such as <i>I</i> , <i>we</i> , <i>you</i> , <i>us</i> , and <i>our</i> . These are cues to things that really interest the prospective customer.	Suspend judgment. Although it is important to determine the speaker's main points and paraphrase them in your own mind, it is absolutely critical to suspend judgment. The latter will prevent understanding and color one's further effectiveness as a listener.
Invite amplification (e.g., "Did anything else happen?").	Invite additional comments. Phrases like "Go on," "What else?," "How do you feel about that?," and "Did anything else occur?" encourage the speaker to say more and to continue to share ideas and information (not to mention thinking positively of the questioner). ⁶	Demonstrate attention through nonverbal behavior (nodding head, etc.). Some theorists argue that the majority of active listening is demonstrated by nonverbal behavior. Some suggestions: demonstrate positive bodily responsiveness (i.e., don't shake your head in disbelief); lean forward; directly face the speaker; don't angle away; use relaxed, but alert posture (e.g., don't slouch, but don't be tense); establish an open body position; nod your head in agreement and smile; be aware of proper proxemics (distance); and use vocal responsiveness (i.e., change pitch, rate, inflection, and volume periodically). ¹⁰
Establish eye contact.	Establish eye contact with the customer quickly. The ears tend to follow where the eyes go. Maintaining eye contact also makes it more difficult to feign attention. Moreover, it will help you spot changes in the buyer's facial expressions or body movements.	Look for commonality of interests and experiences. Identify areas of agreement or common experience. Briefly relate similar past experiences, or explain a similar point of view. This demonstrates understanding.
Ask clarifying questions (e.g., "So what you're saying is . . .").	Ask clarifying questions to test your understanding of a message. Ask, "Did I understand you to say . . .?" "It sounds like you're saying . . .," "It seems as if you feel . . ." As the last question implies, it is important to verify not only facts but also feelings—often they are much more important. Not only do such questions act to clarify but they also demonstrate caring. There is an old saying in selling: "Your customers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Feeding back what they are saying (both content and feeling) demonstrates caring. Rephrasing is one of the most powerful listening techniques available to you, and one of the easiest to learn. ⁷ Simply think carefully about what you just heard, put it in your own words, and say it back to them in the form of a question. For example, when someone indicates to you they are concerned about getting new service to their facilities under construction, your rephrase and their response might sound like the following: "I can certainly appreciate why having the service ready when you are has to be important to you!" Rephrasing shows the other person that their situation sunk in with you and you really understand it. It also gives the person a chance to reiterate and expand upon their concern, which makes them feel better about it and gives you the chance to identify something you can do to make a difference. Some good ways to begin rephrase questions are the following: • "As I understand it . . ." • "Do you mean . . ."	Listen for ideas, not just facts. Salespeople should listen for ideas, not just facts. A study conducted a number of years ago at a midwestern university determined the differences between the best and worst listeners. The poor listeners expend too much effort on trying to remember all the facts. The good listeners spend their time evaluating central ideas. For example, when a speaker starts enumerating a list of seven points, poor listeners try to remember it in detail. Meanwhile, the speaker has progressed to point two, as the listener tries to catch up, only to discover that point three is now being discussed, and on it goes. The poor listener has retained only disassociated fragments, rather than trying to understand what the facts add up to by relating them to each other and seeing what key ideas bind them together. ¹¹ Encourage communication through responses that let the speaker know you are paying attention. Periodic responses such as "uh-huh," "yes," and "I see" encourage the speaker. Avoid complete silence. The lack of any response whatsoever implies you are not listening. It may result in defensiveness or anger on the part of the speaker.

nonverbal communication
Actions, gestures, facial expressions, and other nonspoken forms of expression that reveal underlying thoughts and emotions.

5-2 Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication refers to actions, gestures, facial expressions, and other nonspoken forms of expression that reveal underlying thoughts and emotions. It may or may not occur simultaneously with verbal communication. Attention to nonverbal cues from customers can tell much about their thoughts, particularly those they might not wish to disclose in spoken form. Nonverbal communication represents a substantial proportion of the communication process. According to an expert in the area, Albert Mehrabian, 55 percent of our communication is through posture, gestures, and facial expressions; 38 percent through our tone of voice; and only 7 percent through words themselves.¹²
Mehrabian indicates that nonverbal communication, as indicated in Table 5-2, indicates the degree of liking, status, and sheer responsiveness.¹³

1. *Liking* is often expressed by leaning forward, a direct body orientation (e.g., standing face-to-face), close proximity, touching, relaxed posture, open arms and body, positive facial expression, and direct eye contact. Observe, for example, males watching sports on television and drinking beer.
2. *Status*, especially high status, is communicated nonverbally by bigger gestures, relaxed posture, and less eye contact. Male executives will talk to subordinates (or professors to students) while leaning back in their desk chair with their hands behind their head and their elbows out (very relaxed), but the subordinate (or student) seldom behaves the same way.
3. *Responsiveness* nonverbally is exhibited by moving toward the other person, by spontaneous gestures, shifting posture and position, and by facial expressiveness. These are all positive examples of responsiveness.

Table 5-2 Nonverbal Communication

Liking is expressed by	Leaning forward
	Direct body orientation
	Close proximity
	Open arms and legs
Status is expressed by	Bigger, more expansive gestures
	Relaxed posture
	Less eye contact
	Leaning back in chair with hands behind head
Responsiveness is expressed by	Moving toward the other person
	Spontaneous gestures
	Facial expressiveness

5-2a Pacing

The importance of effective listening and questioning in fostering two-way communication should be obvious by now. Some recent research in social behavior also has implications for selling.¹⁴ This research indicates that one of the most powerful ways of gaining rapport with people is by first pacing (or “tracking”) them, that is, aligning oneself as closely as possible with the other in mood, attitude, and verbal and nonverbal behavior. **Pacing** involves presenting to another person those aspects of yourself that are most nearly like those of the other. The principle is that likes attract, and once someone likes you, he or she will want to agree with you. Thus, the salesperson should first pace and then lead. An expressive salesperson dealing with an analytic-type buyer, for example, should tone down his or her approach to secure rapport.

Pacing may be thought of as holding a mirror up to people so that what they see, hear, or feel is consistent with their experience of themselves and their reality. Pacing involves getting into agreement or alignment with, or bearing a likeness to other people in a way that communicates, “You can trust me. I’m on your side. I’m like you.” The salesperson should attempt to match the posture, facial expression, gestures, and breathing of the client. People tend to like people like themselves and will want to agree with people they like; pacing is critical to this process.

Pacing calls for the salesperson to match the client’s verbal behavior. Imagine a sales representative from New York trying to do business with someone from Alabama. As the New Yorker talks ever more rapidly and frenetically, the relaxed Southerner responds more slowly, wondering what in the world is motivating this animated creature. It also makes sense for the salesperson to incorporate client words and phrases into his or her own speech. The idea here is for the client to think, “I like this person—he [or she] speaks my language.”¹⁵

Pacing extends to nonverbal behavior, too. Consider this quote from a study published in the *Harvard Business Review*: “In moments of great rapport, a remarkable pattern of nonverbal communication can develop. Two people will mirror each other’s movements—dropping a hand, shifting their body at exactly the same time. This happens so quickly that without videotape or film replay one is unlikely to notice the mirroring. But managers can learn to watch for disruptions in this mirroring because they are dramatically obvious when they occur. . . . Instead of smooth mirroring, there will be a burst of movement, almost as if both are losing balance.”¹⁶

pacing
Aligning oneself as closely as possible with another in mood, attitude, and verbal and nonverbal behavior.

By implication, salespeople should do the same. The more that the salesperson and client share movements or posture, the greater their feelings of acceptance, belonging, and well-being.

Evidently, pacing is innate and something we often do instinctually. At the Child Development Unit of the Boston University Medical Center, Condon and Sander studied films that showed the “correspondence between analysis of the soundtrack of [an] adult’s speech and body movements of [an] infant.”¹⁷ In some cases, the infant was barely 12 hours old. Other researchers have found that newborn babies orient themselves to sound, preferring the sound of the human voice, especially a woman’s voice. They prefer to gaze at faces rather than at objects; their eyes follow a turning human face, and they may imitate certain facial gestures. In *Beyond Culture*, Edward T. Hall cites studies in which movies “taken in a variety of settings and circumstances reveal that when two people talk to each other their movements are synchronized.”¹⁸ This synchronization, Hall instructs, occurs in barely discernable ways: an eyelid blinks or a finger curls in synchrony with a particular word sound or voice stress. In other circumstances, two bodies may move entirely in synchrony with one another, “as though the two were under the control of a master choreographer.” Furthermore, observes Hall, “Viewing movies in very slow motion, looking for synchrony, one realizes that what we know as dance is really a slowed-down, stylized version of what human beings do whenever they interact.”¹⁹

Some people are surprised to learn that successful salespeople even pace the negative body language of their listeners. By temporarily adopting the customer’s body language, salespeople initially establish agreement on a nonverbal level. Simultaneously, they pace the prospect verbally and in mood. The latter may seem especially strange, but think back to the last time you were in a bad mood. Suppose you were having a bad day and someone were to comment, “You know, I’m not myself today. I don’t know why, so I’m just taking it as it comes. But I can still find a few things to enjoy. Like talking to a friend or going out for a walk.” Once the prospect feels the sales rep is in step and understands, he or she can begin leading toward the positive.²⁰

If the general idea is for the salesperson to pace and then lead, what happens if the client fails to respond? The answer is simple: resume pacing. When rapport is fully developed, then try leading again.

5-2b Source Credibility

Nonverbal communication is especially important in establishing the credibility of the salesperson. A prospective buyer’s response to communication is heavily influenced by his or her attitude toward the source of the communication. If the source is viewed as believable, the message is more likely to be influential. For example, an article concerning business’s future role in society would be more persuasive if it appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* rather than in *Penthouse*.

Several factors influence source credibility. In the initial meeting, the salesperson’s company identification is likely to carry much weight with the prospective customer. A data-processing salesperson from IBM will have a much easier time gaining the confidence of a U.S. prospect than would a sales representative for Bull (a French computer manufacturer). The perceived expertise of salespeople also affects their credibility with the customer. It is important for the receiver to feel that the sender of the message is knowledgeable about the product or service.

The external characteristics of salespeople are of great importance in conveying an image of credibility. Gestures, appearance, dress, and language all provide cues to source credibility. The critical aspect of nonverbal behavior to the salesperson is that if a discrepancy exists between verbal and nonverbal behavior, the latter

will be believed. If the salesperson expounds eloquently on the virtues of his or her product, but fails to make eye contact, crosses his or her legs, or fidgets nervously, the verbal will all be for naught.

5-2c Body Language

Body language is regarded by many as the most important element of nonverbal communication. It is critical for salespeople to recognize the messages present in clients' body language, because these messages reveal much about their thinking. Salespeople should also recognize the ability of their own bodies to communicate. Salespeople can increase tension and decrease trust by projecting negative body language, or they can evoke contrasting effects through positive body language. Knowing how to use body language is an added dimension toward understanding both oneself and others. Recent research by Professor Goldin-Meadow in her book, *Hearing Gesture: How Our Hands Help Us Think*, concludes that gesture "plays an active role . . . in the thoughts we think."²¹ Gesturing seems to decrease "cognitive load," the amount of mental effort needed to perform some task. Gesturing is a way to take your thoughts and put them out there for you and others to see. It may help you examine your thoughts, even if not consciously. So, the smart sales rep will pay more attention, the more the client gestures.

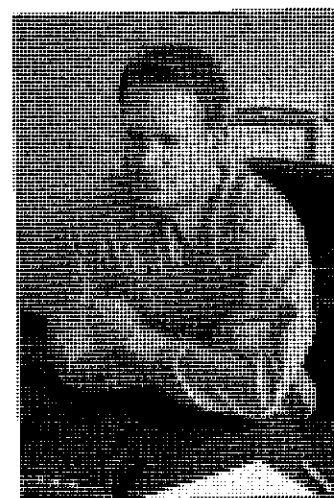
Individual gestures are similar to individual words in a sentence. By themselves, they mean little, if anything. Just as many words can be put together to form a sentence, gestures can be put together to compose a complete picture. Yet one must be cautious in interpretation; body language is an inexact science. At times, a gesture has meaning, while at other times, it is simply a more comfortable position for the individual.

Some of the basic elements of body language are the eyes, face (especially the lips), hands, arms, legs, body posture, and walk. In combination, these elements can communicate just as effectively as words. For example, can you interpret what message the customer in the photograph is conveying? If you were a salesperson who had completed a presentation to her, how well would you say you had done?

The customer in the photograph has adopted a defensive posture. His body is rigid, his arms are tightly crossed, his lips are pursed, and his left fist probably clenched. This crossed-arm position is common in everyday life and seems to be used universally throughout the world to communicate defensiveness. Teachers use it, especially when questioned too closely by students. The very young will cross their arms when defying their parents. The very old will use it when defending their right to be heard. The position acts as a guard against anticipated attack or as a fixed position from which the individual prefers not to move.

When confronted by a buyer in a defensive posture, salespeople may respond in several ways. After brief pacing, they might seek to convey their own sincerity and openness through appropriate body language. By opening their hands, moving closer to the client, unbuttoning or removing a coat, or sitting at the edge of a chair, salespeople may reduce the client's defensiveness. They might hand the prospect a sales brochure or proceed to demonstrate some feature of the product. They might also ask carefully worded questions to draw out the source of the client's resistance.

The same tactics are appropriate when the prospect signals outright rejection by touching or rubbing the nose, crossing the arms and legs, throat clearing, hand rubbing or ear tugging, and glancing sideways. Here it is particularly critical that salespeople ask questions to draw out the problem: "I think there's something here that doesn't sit quite right with you. I wonder if you could tell me what it is?"



A classic defensive gesture

In contrast, the salesperson may hope for a favorable evaluation from the prospect pictured. This prospect has adopted the classic body language for evaluation. She is leaning toward the person who is speaking, is making eye contact, and looks friendly, inviting conversation.

This body language so characteristic of evaluation was first pointed out by Charles Darwin in his early studies. He also observed that both human beings and animals tend to cock their heads slightly whenever they hear something that interests them. Stroking the chin also tends to be a universal gesture.²² Many Western movies include a scene where the deputy strokes his chin and says, "I don't know, Sheriff, if that's the best way to catch that outlaw gang." In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, whenever Tevye, the lead character, has to think things over, he invariably strokes his beard.

Outright acceptance on the part of the prospect is indicated by leaning forward (if in a chair), with a relaxed body posture, open hands and uncrossed legs, and a lively and well-modulated voice. If this is the case, the salesperson should cease further presentation and seek to secure an order. Continuing when the customer is ready to buy may lead to boredom and eventual loss of the sale.

It is especially important for the salesperson to watch for conflicts between verbal and nonverbal behavior. If prospects state emphatically that they aren't interested in a product and simultaneously lean forward and stroke their chins, their gestures indicate a true interest. In such a situation, the salesperson should attempt to open up the prospect with careful questioning.

There is not space here for an exhaustive discussion of body language, but some of the more important gestures are explained in Table 5-3.

After studying Table 5-3, see if you can identify the emotions portrayed in the photo. Now that you are becoming an expert, remember one thing: Sometimes a gesture is a gesture and nothing more. The client with whom you seem to be failing miserably might just have the flu!

Starting from the left corner of the photo, can you associate the gestures on the right with their emotions? Your choices are boredom, defensiveness, rejection, openness, nervousness, confidence, frustration, and evaluation.

(Answers: 1. rejection, 2. openness, 3. nervousness, 4. evaluation, 5. defensiveness, 6. confidence, 7. frustration, 8. boredom)

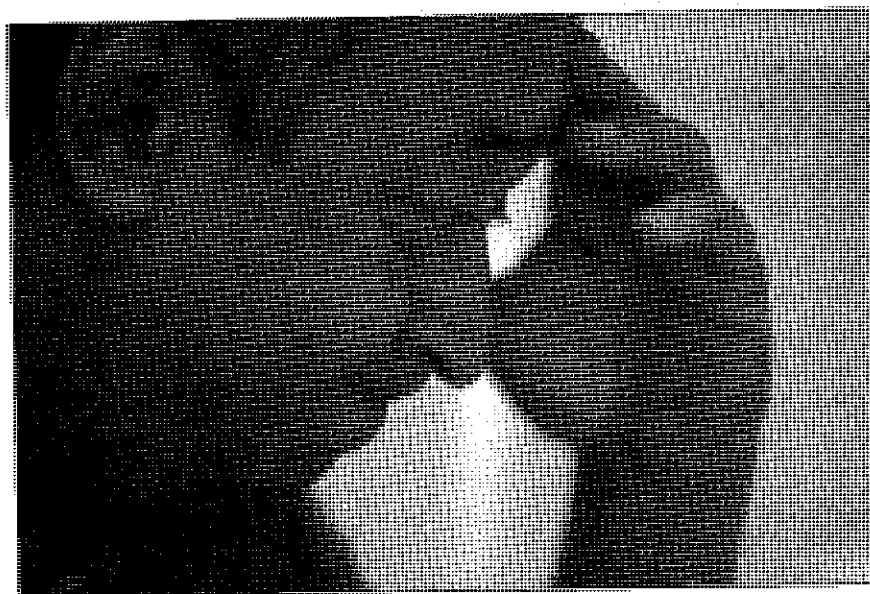
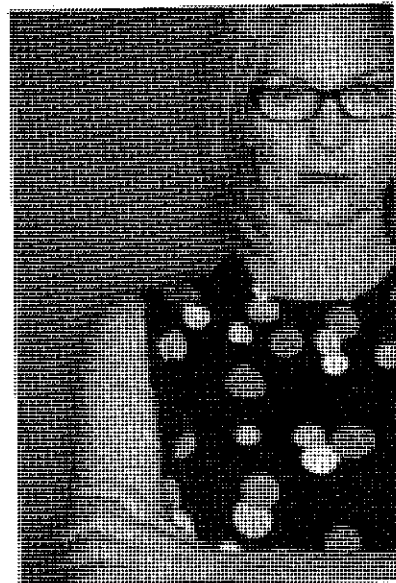
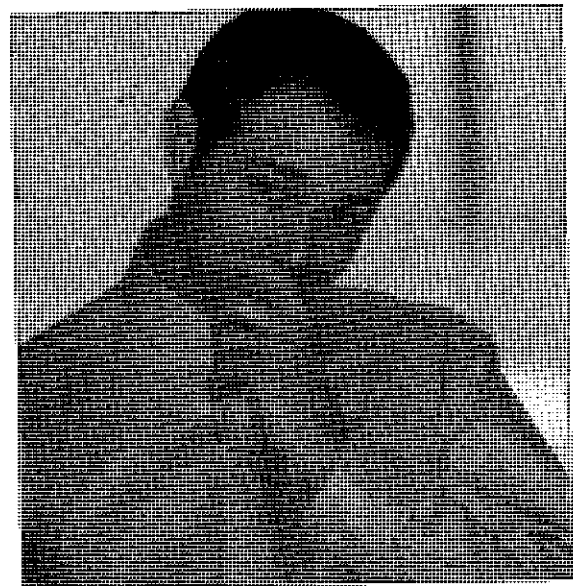
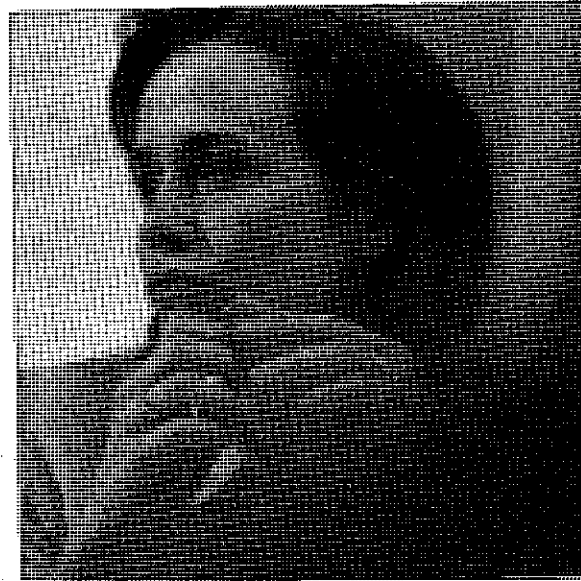
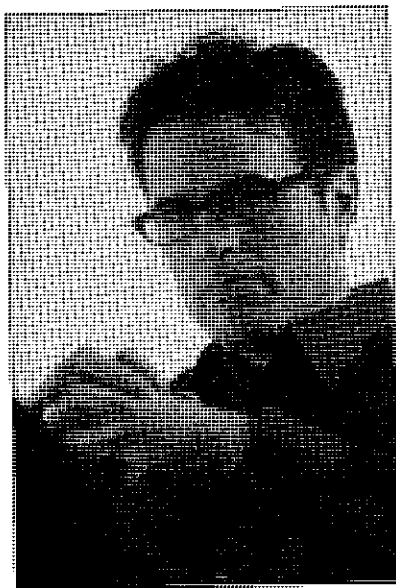
While the salesperson is busy observing the prospect, the prospect is busy observing the salesperson's nonverbal behavior. A blank face and an uninterested air with limited body movement are likely to create little enthusiasm in the customer. Smiling and nodding one's head represent marked improvements. According to a Johns Hopkins study of persuasion, people who are unable to use nonverbal communication techniques such as "smiling, gazing, interpersonal distance, and physical contact" have trouble getting their messages across.²³



The salesperson must be a master communicator, both verbal and nonverbal.

Table 5-3 Important Body Language

Gesture	Meaning
Open hands, sit on edge of chair, open coat	Openness
Stroking chin, tilted head, hand to cheek	Evaluation
Slouching, no eye contact, unfocused	Indifference
Crossed arms and/or legs, touching nose	Rejection
Erect, steepling hands, hands behind head	Confidence



Can you identify the emotions portrayed?

Table 5-4 The Use of Eyes in Selling

While listening, the salesperson must maintain eye contact.

The general rule is that the speaker occasionally finds time to break eye contact.

The listener should spend more time looking at the speaker.

In the United States, eye contact for short periods of time is appropriate.

Good contact is called the "glance away"—don't stare.

The salesperson should glance away periodically, but not during important points.

If a speaker pauses and looks away, she isn't finished speaking.

A locking of gazes indicates that the listener can now become the speaker.

5-2d Eyes

In U.S. culture, eye contact for short periods of time is appropriate, although prolonged eye contact is taken to be threatening. A study of the effects of nonverbal behavior conducted at the College of Charleston showed that those who gazed steadily (but did not stare) during a social interaction were judged to be more sincere.²⁴ In a similar British study, a team of investigators studied the effects of eye contact in a real-life setting in which a person soliciting money for charity alternately looked the prospective donor in the eye and looked at a money tin. Significantly more money was donated in the former situation.²⁵

As explained in Table 5-4, in American culture, good eye contact is called the "glance away." Americans don't like others to stare at them. If a salesperson locks eyes with a prospect, stares the prospect right in the eye, never blinks, and never looks away, then the prospect will begin to feel very uncomfortable. When interacting with American customers, it is best for the salesperson to occasionally let his or her eyes drift away from the customer's face.²⁶ It is critical, though, for salespeople to maintain eye contact when listening. In our society, the general rule is that the speaker should find ways to break eye contact and look away. The listener is expected to spend relatively more time looking at the speaker. Looking away too often signals to the speaker: "I am not completely satisfied with what you are saying. I have some qualifications." Moreover, listeners should be careful in picking the moment to begin speaking. If speakers pause but look away, they are signaling that they are not finished and should not be interrupted. A locking of their gazes at this point, however, would signal that the listener can begin speaking.

5-2e Facial Expression

Charles Darwin maintained that facial expressions are universal and are based on the process of biological evolution. He believed the face to be a sensitive tablet upon which are written universally recognized emotions.

It is important for salespeople to understand facial expressions. If a prospect's mouth is relaxed without a mechanical smile and the chin is forward, the salesperson's presentation is being closely followed. If prospects maintain eye contact with the salesperson for seconds at a time, with a slight smile angled upward toward the nose, they are weighing the proposal. If the smile becomes relaxed and they appear enthusiastic, the sale is almost assured. However, if the jaw muscles tighten and the lips become pursed, then they have taken a defensive position and may reveal and react as little as possible. All of us have noted this tight-lipped expression in others at one time or another.

Table 5-5 Body Language of Receptive and Unreceptive Listeners

Body Channel	Receptive (Positive Cues)	Unreceptive (Negative Cues)
Facial expressions and eyes	Smiles, much eye contact, more interest in the person than what is being said	No eye contact or squinted eyes, jaw muscles clenched, cheeks twitching with tension, eye contact is a sidelong glance
Arms and hands	Arms spread; hand open on the table, relaxed in the lap, or on the arms of a chair; hands touching the face	Hands clamped together, arms crossed in front of the chest, hand over the mouth or rubbing the back of the neck
Legs and feet	Sitting: legs together, or one in front of the other Standing: weight evenly distributed, body tilted toward the speaker	Standing: crossed legs, pointing away from the speaker Sitting or standing: legs and feet pointing toward the exit
Torso	Sitting on the edge of the chair, unbuttoning suit coat, body tilted toward the speaker	Leaning back in the chair, suit coat remains buttoned

5-2f Summing It Up for Customers

Putting together what we have said so far, Table 5-5 provides clues as to differentiating receptive from unreceptive listeners.



5-2g Body Language Tips for the Salesperson

Salespeople, as well as clients, put out visual signals based on their body language. Often they are not even aware of doing so. 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.

1. *Posture.* Next time you notice you're feeling a bit down, take a look at how you're standing or sitting. Chances are you'll be slouched over with your shoulders drooping down and inward, making a bad impression. If standing, stand up straight and face your prospects 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, then you are not exactly exuding confidence. Other "don'ts" include:²⁷
 - 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 "figleaf" stance): This makes you look weak and timid.
 - Hands joined behind your back: This stance (the "parade rest") makes you seem like you have no energy.
 - Leaning back in a chair, if seated: You look like you're ready to pass judgment.
 - Putting your hands in your pockets: This makes you seem nervous and can result in jingling any change or keys that might be there.
2. *Head position.* When you want to feel confident and self-assured, keep your head level both horizontally and vertically. You can also use this straight-head position when you want to be authoritative and want what you're saying to be taken seriously. Conversely, when you want to be friendly, listening, and

receptive, tilt your head just a little to one side or other. You can shift the tilt from left to right at different points in the conversation.²⁸

3. *Arms.* Arm position indicates how open and receptive you are to everyone you meet and interact with, so keep your arms out to the side of your body or behind your back. This shows you are not scared to take on whatever comes your way and you meet things "full frontal." Generally, the more outgoing you are as a person, the more you tend to use big movements with your arms. The more quiet you are, the less you move your arms away from your body. Try to strike a natural balance and keep your arm movements midway. When you want to come across in the best possible light, crossing the arms in front of others is inadvisable.
4. *Legs.* Legs are the hardest parts of our bodies to control consciously. They tend move around a lot more than normal when we are nervous, stressed, or being deceptive. The best bet is to keep them as still as possible. Be careful too in the way you cross your legs. Do you cross at the knees, ankles, or bring your leg up to rest on the knee of the other? Be aware that the last position mentioned is known as the "figure four" and is generally perceived as the most defensive leg cross.
5. *Angle of the body.* Angle of the body in relation to others gives an indication of our attitudes and feelings toward them. We angle toward people we find attractive, friendly, and interesting and angle ourselves away from those we don't!
6. *Hands.* Hand gestures are so numerous that it's hard to give a brief guide. Palms slightly up and outward is seen as open and friendly. Palm-down gestures are generally seen as dominant, emphasizing, and possibly aggressive, especially when there is no movement or bending between the wrist and the forearm.
7. *Mouth.* Mouth movements can give away all sorts of clues. We purse our lips and sometimes twist them to the side when we're thinking. We also might use this movement to hold back an angry comment that we don't wish to reveal. Nevertheless, it will probably be spotted by other people, and although they may not know the comment, they will get a feeling you were not too pleased.
8. *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.
 - Grimacing: Your prospect will wonder where it hurts.
9. *Handshake.* A handshake can be soft, firm, brief, long, or even painful. The way you shake hands provides clues to your personality. Aggressive people have firm handshakes. People with low self-esteem often have a limp handshake. A domineering man often squeezes the hand of a woman during a greeting. The woman can move her index and little finger in toward the palm to prevent a crushing handshake. This negates his dominant act and keeps her in equal control. So adopt a handshake that is firm, yet not crushing. Convey confidence and professionalism, not dominance.

5-3 Dress As a Form of Communication

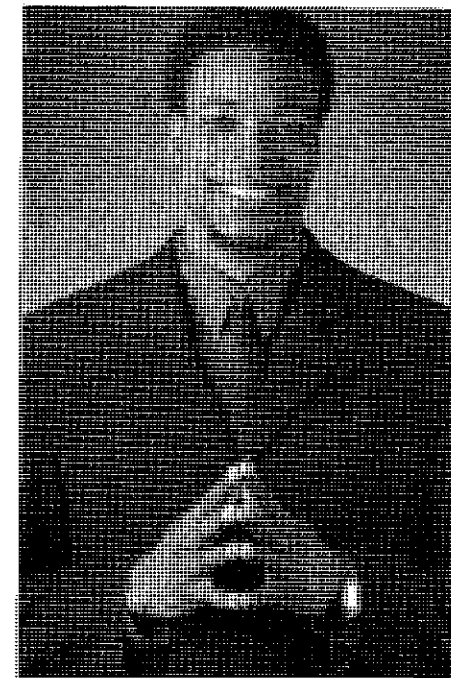
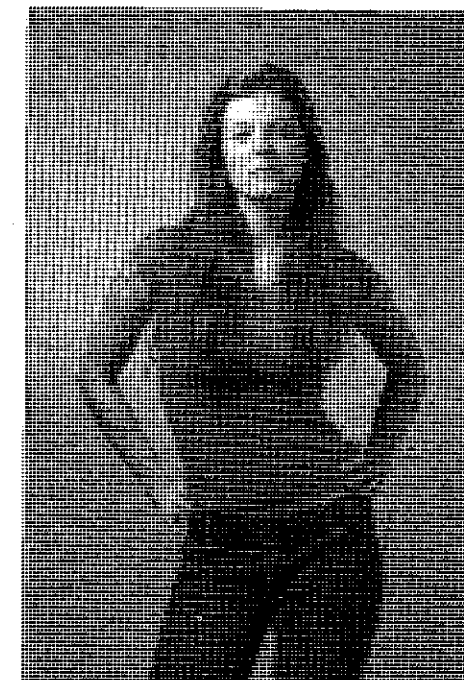
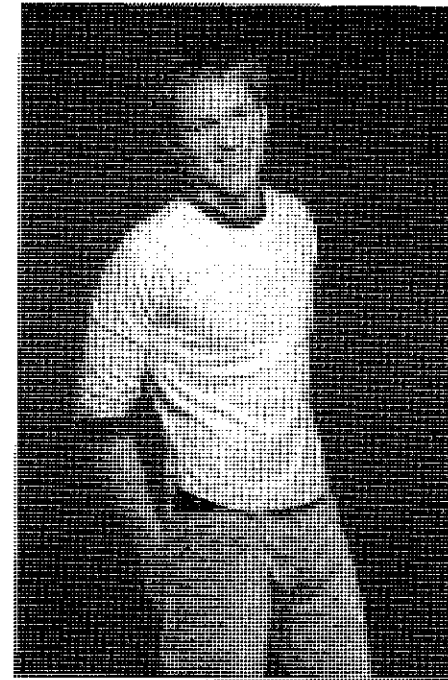
The moment you meet prospective clients, they judge you by what they see and feel. The process takes less than 10 seconds, but the impression is permanent. Whether you make or break a sale can literally depend on the silent signals that you send during this first contact. We have already discussed the importance of nonverbal behavior to making that initial impression. Your dress is as critical—perhaps even more so—when making that first impression. As the old saying goes: You never get a second chance to make a first impression! Not only is clothing important to how others perceive us, but it also affects our view of ourselves and our confidence. We often estimate how we are perceived by others and incorporate this image into our own self-perception. Clothing, then, can affect confidence, and salespeople should take note.

For the past few years there has been a loosening of corporate dress codes, originating with “Casual Friday.” This evolution is portrayed and humorously carried through to its possible conclusion in the photo. The nation’s workplace shift from Casual Friday to Casual Every Day may be shifting again—back to Casual Friday.²⁹ The latest trend in men’s business dress is best summed up in a word coined by Ford Motor designers: *retrofuturism*. It involves taking classic design and updating it with modern technology. You see it on the 2003 Ford Thunderbird, revitalized with twenty-first century engineering and creature comforts while remaining true to its 1955 styling. You also see it in men’s suits, shirts, and ties that marry innovative fabrics and inspiration drawn from past eras of elegance.³⁰ The traditional single-breasted, gray suit, for instance, may now have lapels that are peaked rather than notched, and a more fitted jacket than the “sack” suit of yesterday. Yet comfort is foremost, in part thanks to the technology used to create the lightest-weight wools ever. In keeping with the retrofuturist trend in tailored clothing, the best shirts and ties feature Old World design elements in traditional and updated colors and fabrics—a solid color shirt in a microherringbone weave, for instance. What one would have formerly thought of as sporty—tattersalls, gingham checks, and subtle plaids—now come in dressed-up versions with French cuffs. In ties, classic patterns such as regimental stripes, understated geometrics, or even solids are worked in luxurious, textured silks. Such change returning to the traditional is understandable through surveys. According to a recent S&MM/Equation Research survey of 361 executives, 30 percent of executives say that customers have commented negatively on a rep’s appearance or grooming. And 49 percent say their salespeople have encountered prejudice from customers because of the way they look. In fact, 48 percent say salespeople’s physical image has become more important since the economic boom of the late 1990s. In addition, 38 percent believe their companies have lost business because of a sales rep’s negative appearance. “When things are slow, companies are looking for a safe harbor,” says Scott Testa, COO of Mindbridge Software, Inc., an intranet software company based in Norristown, Pennsylvania. “They are looking for companies they can feel comfortable with, and part of that comfort comes from a level of professionalism that is the result of good physical presentation.”³¹

Has Casual Gone Too Far?

With a loosening of dress codes, sales and marketing personnel are caught in the middle, as they have to travel between their offices and that of their customers or prospects, each of which may have its own dress code. Because of this dilemma, perhaps the place to start is with the orthodox.

In *New Dress for Success* and *New Women’s Dress for Success*, John T. Molloy writes, “In almost any situation where two men meet, one man’s clothing is saying



What would you wear to work?

to the other man: ‘I am more important than you are, please show respect’ or ‘I am your equal and expect to be treated as such.’³² Of these two situations, salespeople should dress for treatment as equals. Both overdressing and underdressing are to be avoided. Overdressing might cause customers to be uncomfortable and hesitant about disclosing their needs and wants. Underdressing could cause them to distrust salespeople as lacking in expertise. How, then, should salespeople dress to appear credible?

According to Molloy, the most important garment for both men and women in any business situation is the suit. It will most influence any viewer's stereotyped judgment of the wearer. The suit immediately conveys authority, credibility, and likability, qualities that are critical in business interactions. Molloy has specific guidelines for how business suits should look. In actual practice, although this image has changed somewhat for men; it has changed much more dramatically for women, who are more prevalent than in the past in the executive suite and as sales reps.

5-3a Male Salespeople

Standard attire for men is a conservative dark navy or gray two-piece business suit (of natural fibers, such as wool, if possible), a white long-sleeved button-down dress shirt, a conservative silk tie (that matches the colors in the suit), and nicely polished dress shoes. If you do not own a suit, or the company is a bit more informal, then you should wear a conservative sports coat (no plaids or wild patterns and preferably a dark color), nicely pressed dress slacks, a white long-sleeved button-down shirt, a conservative silk tie, and nicely polished dress shoes. Your belt should match your shoes.

If you have a beard or mustache, it should be neatly trimmed. If you have any visible body parts pierced, most experts recommend removing all jewelry, including earrings.

5-3b Female Salespeople

Standard attire for women is a conservative dark navy or gray skirted wool blend suit. Job experts and employers seem split on the notion of pantsuits, so a skirted suit is a safer choice. Other conservative colors—such as beige or brown—are also acceptable. A blazer with blouse and skirt is a possible second choice to a suit. Skirt length should be a little below the knee and never shorter than above the knee. Avoid wearing a dress. Blouses should be cotton or silk and should be white, or some other light color. Shoes should be low-heeled.



Types of attire for business occasions.

Makeup should be minimal, with lipstick and nail polish in conservative tones. Pantyhose should be flawless (no runs) and conservative in color. You should opt for a briefcase rather than a purse.

5-3c Advice for Both Men and Women

Good advice for both men and women is shown in Table 5-6.

Despite the "retro" trend in dress, many companies still have retained a more casual dress code. So what is the salesperson to do? Rule number 1 is to consider the nature of the client's work. If you're calling on someone in the financial business, the "dress for success" suit is appropriate. For the advertising business, more casual attire is suitable. If you are uncertain, especially with a new prospect, call ahead and inquire about their dress code. Above all, be adaptable. Michael Canney, a sales rep for Becton, Dickinson and Company, a medical devices firm in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, rarely wears a jacket in his territory of Austin, Texas, because it's just too hot. "In the summer, wearing a nice button-down and khakis is fine." Canney often visits nurses in hospitals between 5 A.M. and 6 A.M. and showing up clad in a suit and tie would just be impractical. "I'm working with people who are hands-on. As long as you look professional, that's the most important thing."³³

5-3d Guidelines for Casual Dress

So how does the salesperson dress casually?³⁴ (Note: "Dress casual" means going with a coat but no tie, or with a tie and no coat.)

For men:

- Try a blazer with an open-collar shirt. Choose a polo-style knit or band-collar woven shirt.
- Sport cotton trousers in khaki, navy, or hunter green.
- Loafers and socks with a subtle pattern that matches your pants.

Table 5-6 Checkpoints for Appearance

Men	Women
Minimal or no cologne	Minimal perfume
No food, gum, or cigarettes	No food, gum, or cigarettes
Empty pockets	Empty pockets
Clean, trimmed nails	Light-colored nail polishes or clear polishes only; short nails
Matching socks	Dark or nude hose with no runs
Shined, conservative shoes	Clean, polished, conservative shoes with heels no higher than 2 inches
No visible body piercings (nose, eyebrow, lip, labret, etc.)	No visible body piercings (nose, eyebrow, lip, labret, etc.)
Clean, trimmed head and facial hair	Attractive, controlled hairstyle—long hair should be pulled back or up
Fresh shave	Light makeup
Conservative tie	Moderate, conservative jewelry
Clean, pressed business suit in blue or gray	Clean, pressed business suit in blue or gray or tailored dress
Light shirt	Well-tailored shirt—no low necklines or straining buttons
Light portfolio or briefcase	Light portfolio or briefcase

For women:

- Cotton or silk shirts. Add a vest to dress up a plain shirt.
- Mix jackets with your career suits with separates.
- Try softer fabrics in slim or full skirts. Skirts should be slightly above the knee to ankle length.
- Dress down with trousers or soft pants.
- Take a break from high heels and wear flats, oxfords, or loafers.
- French blue and tan are the contemporary casual colors.
- The sport coat is a bridge. It can be worn with khakis, various dress slack fabrics, mocks and polos, and dress shirts and ties.
- Just remember, without further information, on the first call, dress conservatively; you never get a second chance to make a first impression!

5-4 Time and Space "Speak"

If someone is late for an appointment with you, how does it make you feel? In our society, being late conveys the message: "You aren't important. I don't need to hurry to be on time for you." Interestingly enough, this isn't true in all cultures. In the United States, it is mandatory that the salesperson be on time for an appointment, but in South America, where one expects to wait and wait, being on time is not that critical.

Distance, or more formally, **proxemics**, also communicates. We interact with people at different distances. We don't talk with customers at the same distance that we do with our spouses. Neither do we interact with strangers at the same distance that we do with friends. To verify this, the next time you go to a doctor's office where there is just one other patient, sit next to that person and watch his or her reaction.

Research has demonstrated that everyone has an invisible bubble of space around them that contracts and expands. This bubble is a kind of mobile territory that the individual will defend against intrusion. In crowded public places, we tense our muscles and hold ourselves stiff, communicating to others our desire not to intrude upon their space and, moreover, not to touch them. At all costs, we try to avoid eye contact. Walking along the street, our bubble expands slightly as we move in a stream of strangers, taking care not to bump into them. In a work situation or in a restaurant, our bubble changes as it adjusts to the environment.

People in the United States employ four main distances in their business and social relations: intimate (up to 2 feet); personal (2 to 4 feet); social (4 to 12 feet); and public (more than 12 feet) (see Figure 5-3).³⁵ Each of these distances has a near and a far phase and is usually detectable by changes in the volume of the voice. The intimate distance is used for the most private activities, such as showing affection to another person. Even at the far phase of the intimate distance, one is within easy touching distance of the other person. In general, the use of intimate distance between adults is frowned upon in public places. It is also far too close for strangers, except where crowding forces it.

In the second zone, personal distance, the close phase represents the distance at which spouses interact in public. If another person moves into this zone, the spouse may not look kindly on the gesture. The far phase is the most common spacing for people in conversation. But this distance is not all that intimate; the phrase at "arm's length" accurately describes the nature of this distance.

The social distance is reserved for business transactions. People who work together tend to use close social distance, 4 to 7 feet. This is also the common distance

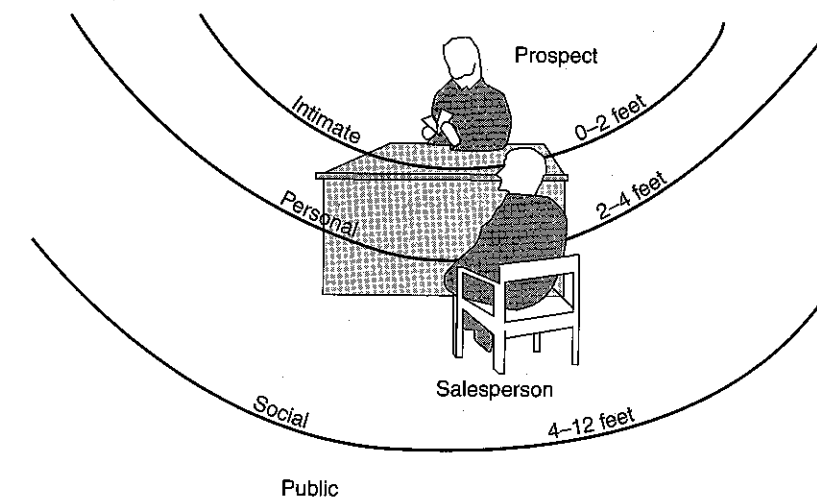


Figure 5-3
Proxemic Zones

for conversation at social gatherings. To stand at this distance while facing someone who is seated has a dominating effect (for example, teacher to pupil, boss to secretary). The far phase of social distance, 7 to 12 feet, lends a formal tone to business or social discourse. In an executive office, the desk serves to keep people at this distance.

The social distance, especially the close phase (4 to 7 feet), represents the distance at which salespeople should approach clients they have never met. Imagine the reaction of a buyer if a sales representative were to pull up a chair 2 to 4 feet away and begin a presentation. Although this is not quite as forward, what reaction do salespeople encourage when they enter an office and immediately take over part of the client's desk for their samples? The general rule for salespeople is to begin at the close phase of the social distance and not to approach closer until friendly relations are established. Invading the client's space too soon will cause the client to draw up a defensive barrier that may never be broken.

The fourth and final zone, public distance, is used by teachers in classrooms or speakers at public gatherings. Its farthest phase, 25 feet and beyond, is used for important public figures. Although it is dangerous for the sales representative to approach too closely too soon, it is equally dangerous to begin at too far a distance. Starting from the public distance may create an image of unsociability or conceit.

Psychological proxemics also exist. Your ideas and language may be formal, as in the public zone ("How do you do?"); casual, as in the social zone ("Hi"); friendly, as in the personal zone ("How's the family, Joe?"); or intimate ("Hi, sweetie"). As with distance zones, salespeople may intrude upon their customers' psychological zones by speaking too familiarly too soon.

Interestingly enough, people can be classified into two major proxemic groups: contact and noncontact. When two people from contrasting groups get together, misunderstanding is almost inevitable. Contact people get too close, both physically and psychologically, to their noncontact counterparts, and vice versa, resulting in unpleasant feelings for both parties. The noncontact people are seen as cold, unfriendly, or impolite by the contact people. On the other hand, noncontact people perceive contact people as overly friendly, obtrusive, and smothering. Desire for contact or lack of the same is directly related to one's personality style. Analytics and Drivers prefer noncontact behavior, while Expressives and Amiables desire contact in their relationships. Interestingly enough, for contact-oriented customers, research shows that a light, brief (half-second) touch by a salesperson on the upper arm of

proxemics

The distances at which people interact.

customers caused them to extend the appointment by 63 percent and buy 23 percent more. Timing here is critical. Touch the customer shortly before you want them to do something—agree to another appointment, buy, etc.³⁶

Proxemics also extend to possessions and territory (or “turf”). Have you ever become upset because someone picked up your tennis racket or golf clubs without asking? Or sat in your favorite chair? Buyers, too, have their territory; when threatened, they are not likely to give the salesperson a fair hearing. So salespeople should never stop by a client’s office without an appointment and stick in their heads without knocking. Nor, when in buyers’ offices, should they examine personal objects without permission. And they certainly should not march haughtily into a customer’s office and immediately plop their briefcase on the buyer’s desk. All of us have our territory, and we like to keep it to ourselves, unless we decide otherwise.

So far we have cautioned salespeople not to invade buyers’ space, psychological and territorial, too soon. It is also true that salespeople should move forward under the proper set of circumstances. If a buyer indicates that a friendlier relationship is desired and the salesperson does not reciprocate by moving closer, the buyer may be offended by the salesperson’s remaining distant.

5-5 Vocal Intonation

Much can be learned about prospects from the way they speak. Vocal intonation is particularly revealing about prospects’ intentions. For example, a salesperson will have to choose a different approach depending on whether a prospect has said, “What do you mean!” or “What do you mean?” Salespeople misinterpreting these statements are likely to find themselves in an awkward position.

The salesperson’s own voice is a critical factor in how he or she will be received. If you know enough about your own voice, you can regulate it to make the impression you want, as indicated in Table 5-7. Who has a good voice? Americans love deep, throaty voices like Ronald Reagan’s, but some low voices don’t work well: ex-President Clinton (too low and hoarse).³⁷ Bad voices, according to experts, generally fall into two categories: too nasal and too low. Although there exists little empirical data on vocal characteristics in a selling context, one study is very elucidating.³⁸ In comparing the speech of successful sales performers, Peterson et al., found that speech rate somewhat more rapid than that of normal conversation was correlated with superior performance. The increased rate should not come, how-

Table 5-7 Vocal Intonation

Loudness	Adjust to loudness of buyer
Pitch	Lowness or highness of voice Lessen pitch at the end of a sentence, implying certainty
Vocal quality	Watch for nasality Eliminate breathiness Eliminate harshness Two elements to achieving quality: posture and diction
Enunciation	Sound out every vowel and consonant; if you have a strong regional accent, make sure you are understandable by people from outside of the area
Hesitation	Avoid long pauses
Fillers	Avoid “uh,” “um,” “you know,” “really,” etc.
Emphasis	Pick words to stress

ever, solely from articulating words more rapidly than normal, but by a variety of vocal behaviors, such as compressing pauses between words, phrases, and sentences in conjunction with appropriate phonetic contraction strategies (e.g., *They’re* instead of *they are*; *D’ya* instead of *do you*, etc.). Lowering one’s voice at the end of a sentence also was more successful, projecting an aura of authority and credibility. In contrast, rising inflection gives the impression of uncertainty and questioning. Finally, at least a modicum of vocal variability was associated with sales success. Loudness was not correlated with sales success.

Try taping your voice and analyzing it, using the material already presented and that which follows:

1. **Loudness.** Though not significant in the Peterson study, loudness, as we know from our everyday experiences, can be irritating. As you listen, try to remember whether others often ask you to speak up or repeat things or whether they back off or lean back, indicating you are too loud. You can achieve proper volume control by listening to your prospect’s voice. Speak quietly to the quiet. Speak a little louder to the loud. If you have an angry customer, use a low tone of voice; this will tend to calm him or her.
2. **Pitch.** The lowness or highness of your voice—its overall tone—does much to form people’s impression of you. As mentioned already, watch out for a rising or upward inflection at the end of sentences, signaling tentativeness. The tone should go down, indicating completion and certainty. Avoid singsong variation in your voice, or you will sound like a kindergarten teacher, not a professional salesperson. But don’t go to the other extreme and talk in monotone; some amount of variation is good, as the Peterson study demonstrated. Use a slightly higher pitch when talking about something new and exciting. A lower pitch generally reassures the listener; it should be used to emphasize quality, service, and warranty.
3. **Vocal quality** (or *timbre*). Watch for “talking through your nose.” Nasality is appropriate only for the sounds *n*, *m*, and *ng*. If you are too nasal, open your mouth more to get out vowel sounds. Look out for breathiness, or you will give an impression of bewilderment, delicacy, or conspiracy. Also watch for thinness; it is hard to convey authority if your voice sounds childlike. Steer clear of stridency—a sharp, metallic sound with a high, squeaky pitch. It conveys tension and nervousness. Harshness is another vocal quality to be avoided. When you are angry or irritable, your voice may take on a rough, hard, low-pitched quality. Others’ first impressions of you may be that you are unsympathetic, sarcastic, or overbearing. Two basic elements determine voice quality: (a) posture—which affects the way you use your breath, and (b) diction—which determines clarity, fluency, and (surprisingly) strength. When either posture or diction is poor, pressure builds in the chest or strains your throat. You should learn to deliberately exhale and inhale with the abdominal muscles and ribs and to maintain proper posture, avoiding rounded shoulders and curvature of the lower back, which creates constant downward pressure on the chest and ribs. Diction also helps reduce tightness in the throat by focusing your speaking away from the throat and toward the front of your mouth. Seventy percent of consonants are formed with the lips, tip of the tongue, and the upper front teeth.³⁹
4. **Enunciation.** Salespeople often are so eager to tell prospects about the wonderful features of their products that they forget all about proper enunciation. Sound every vowel and consonant meant to be sounded.



5. *Hesitation.* Leaving long pauses between words and sentences is a bad speech habit. This distracts from the sales presentation and gives the prospect time to build up doubts in his or her mind about the salesperson, the product, and the company. It usually makes the listener wonder if the speaker knows what he or she is talking about.
6. *Fillers.* These are words used to fill uncomfortable silences; they should be eliminated. They might include single-syllable sounds (e.g., *uh, um, ah, eh, and oh*); phrases that add nothing to the meaning of the sentence (e.g., *you know, you see, well so then, ya understand, so really, and OK?*); hedge words, such as *I guess, maybe, perhaps*, qualifiers like *just, that's all, and only*; and noises (e.g., throat clearing, shuffling, tongue clucking, sighs, yawns, and coughing). Clients judge the salesperson's level of confidence and product knowledge by his or her fluency of speech, and fillers are interpreted as nervousness or uncertainty.
7. *Emphasis.* Be aware of what words you emphasize, because this can change the meaning of what you say dramatically. Consider how the statement, "I didn't say he took that" changes dramatically with differing emphases. "I didn't say he took that" (*she* said it). "I didn't say he took *that*" (he took *something else*). "I didn't say he took that" (he *borrowed* it).



5-6 A Final Word

Several times we have mentioned the importance of not overanalyzing nonverbal behavior. Some nonverbal signals have several meanings. Crossed arms can indicate defensiveness, or simply a comfortable position. Touching the nose can suggest doubt in what the person is hearing, or it could be a response to an itch or soreness from a recent cold. Likewise, an unbuttoned jacket can signify openness and cooperation. It could also be an overweight person trying to fit into an old jacket.

Research also indicates that different people have widely different abilities to identify nonverbal behavior. So it is a good idea to be careful about your conclusions from observing nonverbal behavior until you gain experience. Salespeople should pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication. Together they provide a more complete picture of communication.

It is also true that individuals are rarely clear prototypes of any one personality style; all of us usually demonstrate traits across the spectrum. Still, in most instances, there is a distinct dominant personality for each of us, but it isn't always that easy to discern.

Notwithstanding, this discussion should not be interpreted as belying the importance of nonverbal behavior. It merely suggests that its interpretation requires skill and practice. It also suggests that people should not have absolute reliance in their ability to interpret nonverbal cues accurately. The salesperson has to work hard at effective two-way communication; it does not come automatically.

prospect. It also is wise to use active rather than passive descriptions and to recognize that even subtle differences between synonyms can evoke contrasting emotional reactions.

The advantages of two-way communication over one-way communication in selling, plus the importance of active listening, were explained, along with some tips for improving one's listening skills. The critical relationship between questioning and communication was also mentioned, although a complete discussion was postponed until Chapter 9.

A description of nonverbal behavior constituted a major portion of this chapter. The important contribution of

dress to the salesperson's credibility was explained, along with dress suggestions. Other elements of nonverbal behavior include time, space, body language, eyes, facial expression, and vocal intonation. The importance of being able to interpret these nonverbal cues becomes evident when one considers that experts believe language itself composes only 35 percent of all communication. However, students are warned to avoid jumping to immediate conclusions from interpreting nonverbal behavior. Interpretation is an art, not a science; not every nonverbal cue means something, and expertise in interpretation comes only with experience.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the elements of the communication process?
2. Why is two-way communication preferable to one-way communication for salespeople?
3. Why is it necessary for sales representatives to be active listeners?
4. How does one become an active listener?
5. What is source credibility? What factors affect it?
6. Why is nonverbal communication important? What are some of the elements of nonverbal behavior?
7. How does one dress so as to convey credibility?
8. Of what value is color to dress?
9. How does distance influence social interaction? How does time influence it?
10. What is body language? What are some characteristic poses that are important for salespeople to recognize?
11. How is communication evident in facial expression?
12. What is the importance of vocal intonation?
13. "Nonverbal communication is far more important to salespeople than language itself." Defend or refute this statement.
14. It has been said that the common outcome of communication is misunderstanding. Do you agree?
15. Explain what the following instances of body language mean:
 - a. A person talking with his or her hands open
 - b. A person sitting in a meeting with crossed legs and arms
 - c. Someone tapping his or her fingers on a desk
 - d. Someone leaning forward with hand to cheek
16. What does the distance at which others deal with us reveal about their feelings toward us?
17. How good are most people at listening?
18. To be a good listener, one should attend only to the words themselves and ignore all distractions. Discuss.
19. It is important to listen just for facts. Discuss.
20. As one listens, it is important to make assumptions in order to prepare one's rebuttal. Discuss.
21. Explain psychological proxemics. What sorts of people can you approach from a closer distance more rapidly?
22. How should salespeople use eye contact, as both speakers and listeners?
23. Explain pacing.
24. Try watching a TV program while the sound is turned off. From the nonverbal behavior of the actors, determine what is taking place. Then turn up the volume and see if you are correct.
25. Listen to your professors' lectures. How do they use vocal emphasis to indicate the main ideas? How do their voices communicate their attitudes toward their subjects? Can you tell if they are enjoying themselves? Compare different styles. How is your enjoyment of class affected by contrasting vocal styles?
26. Go into the library and look for a table at which there is only one person studying. Take a seat next to the person. Repeat this several times. What is the typical reaction?
27. Keep a record for three or four days of all the clothing, jewelry, and other adornments you wear. Record any changes in clothing you make during the day. Once completed, explain why you made these changes and what the clothes might communicate to others.
28. What are the guidelines for casual dress?

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the importance of communication, beginning with the elements of the communication process: source, encoding, message, decoding, receiver, and

feedback. Salespeople should do everything possible to facilitate clients' understanding. They should avoid using big words that sound impressive but mean little to the