BODY LANGUAGE

7 Easy Lessons to Master the Silent Language

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Introduction: If you could read my mind...

There can be few things more fascinating to men and women than the language of their own bodies. What we'll do over the course of the 7 Lessons is provide you with enough knowledge to confidently read the body language of others and—crucially—to be aware of your own. We'll train you to *look* and *listen*. You'll find that your new-found powers of observation will change your life as you learn to really *look* and really *listen*.

Just remember one thing at the outset: The science of body language is not an **exact science**. Whenever you're dealing with complicated "systems," such as human beings, nothing can ever be straightforward. That's why, as you'll see, it's essential to piece together a number of behaviors to make an accurate reading. Otherwise you'll fall victim to **ID 10T Errors** all the time.

First of all, take a look at the illustration on the next page. You may recognize yourself:

It's not easy to fake body language. The human body is composed of many muscles, and to be aware of the activity of all of them at the same time is impossible—and we're including facial muscles in this, too. No matter how good you think you are at controlling your anatomy, there will always be "*leakage*" (involuntary signals) that give away your true feelings.

❝ *It's not easy to fake body language.* ❞

So let's just summarize the two-way street of body language and *why it's so important:*

- If you're trying to communicate a point, choose the appropriate body language, and you have a far better chance of achieving the outcome you're after.

- Reading the body language (or nonverbals) of others allows you to modify and shape your message based on your receiving subtle positive or negative signals during your interaction.

"The average person looks without seeing, listens without hearing... touches without feeling... moves without physical awareness... and talks without thinking."

Leonardo da Vinci
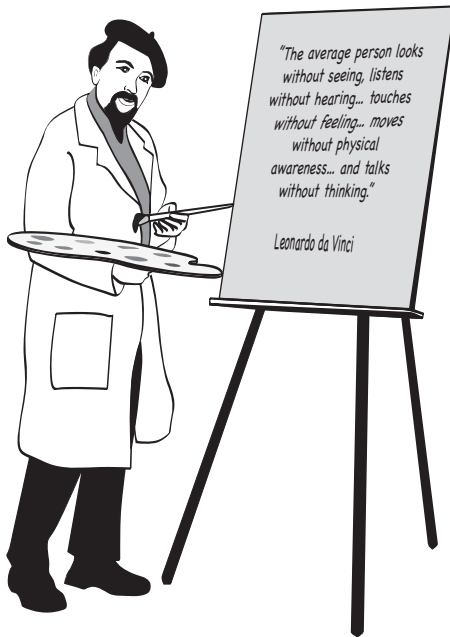
BODY WISE

Feelings are communicated more by nonverbals than by a person's words.

Body language will always be the most trusted indicator for conveying *feelings*, *attitudes* and *emotions*. We unwittingly go about our everyday lives displaying our inner thoughts. The relatively new form of communication, speech, fulfils the role of conveying **information** (facts and data) while the body fulfills the role of **feelings**.

It's an inescapable fact that our nonverbal actions scream out more about our moods and feelings than we would perhaps wish to disclose. People tend to use the whole body to read a person's moods and attitudes, and this is absorbed mainly at the unconscious level.

That's why there is the need for **congruence** (one of our 3 Cs—more on these later) if we're to believe a message that's being conveyed to us. In many cases what we're perhaps displaying may be an unintended mannerism that devalues the words that are spoken and creates a mixed message to the listener.

So it's not that we are even speaking with "forked tongue" (throwback to the old Wild West movies—apologies!), we're just accompanying it with body language that casts **doubt** on the truth of the message so that the words are not congruent with the language of the body. It could just be a bad habit that conveys the wrong impression and has not been corrected. **Intermittent pursing of the lips, holding the head in the hands, covering the mouth with fingers while speaking, sighing at inopportune moments, or constantly shifting in the chair while talking** may all just be bad habits rather than gestures denoting a specific feeling relating to the message. But the point is *they can be misunderstood*.

It's bad enough being found out by your body language when you're trying not to give things away. But when you're "not guilty"—and it's just an irritating habit or

mannerism that's distorting your message—that clearly is not good. If the person doesn't know you that well or is meeting you for the first time, they have no baseline behavior knowledge about you (so they won't know that a particular gesture is a natural part of your demeanor). **All they can go on is what they see or hear**.

BODY WISE

People who know you the least will judge you the most.

When we're communicating with friends, relatives, work colleagues, or strangers, we all have certain habits that are a part of us in a specific context or situation. If you're more aware of body language, then you'll know which of these habits to change to improve relationships. It may not happen overnight, but you can gradually supplant these gestures or mannerisms with ones that don't impede your message, with a bit of patience. As the famous writer and sage Mark Twain once said:

" *Habits can not be thrown out the upstairs window. They have to be coaxed down the stairs one step at a time* "

When Did it Start?

We've only been studying nonverbal communication, or body language, for around 50 years or so, although social anthropologists will remind us that its origin goes back to the beginning of time, before the spoken word. For most of us, the fascination of black and white "silent" movies is as near as we get to appreciating how "actions speak louder

than words." If you've seen the stars of the silent movie era, you'll appreciate the power of this silent language.

Who can forget images of Charlie Chaplin and even a bit later, when the "talkies" started, the films of the Marx brothers, which had sound but conveyed much of the humor through the actors' gestures. (Remember Groucho's dancing eyebrows punctuating his wisecracks?) **If you've seen any of these, you'll appreciate the power of the silent language**. Body language gestures and expressions silently communicate feelings and emotions that *transmit a thought*.

❝*Who can forget images of Charlie Chaplin...and Groucho's (Marx) eyebrows?*❞

The point about body language is that although we are perfectly able to select appropriate gestures and actions to transmit a message, our body also sends out signals outside our conscious awareness—in other words, *without our permission!* Whatever words we use during any interaction with people, they are, whether we like it or not, always accompanied by bodytalk, which can reveal much *more* than the spoken word. Yet, most people go about their business in all activities of their daily life wholly unaware that they are **receivers** *and* **senders** of nonverbal language.

BODY WISE

Initially, we are more likely to believe what we **see** rather than what we **hear**. This will be perceived as the true meaning and, because of the way that the brain stores **memories**, this will be the impression that is **remembered**.

Small wonder, if you consider that around 95 percent of the information that the brain takes in is through the eyes, relegating the other senses—which obviously are no less important—of sound, touch, taste, and smell to just 5 percent to complete the picture.

Recognize Yourself?

It's a simple fact of life: People go around *attracting* others to them, or *repelling* them, because of their body language. Have you ever stopped to consider what your body language says when you are communicating with others? (I guess you have, otherwise you wouldn't be here).

- **Do you find that you're unconsciously turning people off?**
- **Are you—again unconsciously—giving off signals that say you're untrustworthy?**
- **Do you find it difficult to persuade people to change an attitude or behavior?**
- **Do you have difficulty in securing a job offer after an interview?**
- **Do you have trouble in getting a date?**
- **Do you feel that you say the right things at the right time, in most situations, but still make no headway?**

The list is endless.

Be aware that everything we discuss in our 7 Lessons applies at two levels: an analysis of your own body language (what signals do I send out?) and, on the flip side, interpreting the signals that you receive from others.

The point is that if you don't have good body language (either through lack of **self-awareness** or **laziness**) and are not good at reading it in others, then you go about your daily life with everything becoming that much more difficult. Because it's such an essential part of the way we communicate, it means you're not bolstering your conversations and messages with appropriate feeling. Equally, it means you're not *aware of the clues* that are being given out by others.

Emotions and Feelings

Recognizing a person's emotions or feelings is your key to people-reading. ***Emotions are conveyed more clearly through body language than with speech***. You're probably familiar with the term ***"emotional intelligence"*** that, over a decade ago, seemed to have kickstarted an awareness within people of the importance of emotions and feelings in human relationships. Five emotional competencies or skills have been recognized and, the message is this:

" *Five emotional competencies or skills have been recognized.* **"**

1 Be aware of your own emotions.
2 Learn to control your emotions.
3 Assess the emotions of others.
4 Look for clues from the body language.
5 Relate successfully with other people.

The important point about these competencies is that 5 will only happen if you have successfully integrated 1 through 4.

Start with Yourself

You probably are aware of these things subliminally, but in the course of everyday life, it's easy to take shortcuts and, either through laziness, impatience or poor mood, ignore the signals *you* may give out and, at the same time, fail to engage your perceptivity and truly listen to others.

Before you interact with others, you should take a moment to analyse your ***own*** emotional state. What is it? Impatient, angry, anxious, resentful. Each of these, for example, will influence the way that you address other people and body language **leakage** will arise and may cause problems. So you need to manage or control these signals.

What about the others—what's **their** body language telling you about how they are feeling? What you pick up—for example disinterest, frustration, anger, anxiety—may be nothing to do with you. Perhaps the other person has just heard that the insurance company is not paying for the roof damage in the recent storm. The point is, it's up to you as the "receiver" to try to engage his interest.

So *empathy* is needed first, to pick up a feeling and understand another person's perspective, and then *sensitivity* is needed to get people to open up.

Sometimes people's body language is **open** and positive and at some point in a conversation, meeting or presentation will turn to a more **closed** position, perhaps with folded arms or hand-to-face gestures (more about that later) that indicate a problem. Again, you need to have the *perception* to notice this change and at what point it occurred in order to "backtrack" and address the cause of this mood change.

ESP

Let's begin with a memorable phrase: **Body language is the window to a person's mind**. Of course we'd all like to be able to read minds: **That's what you'll be learning how to do**.

The subject of extra sensory perception (or ESP) always arouses strong emotions. But you'll be using a different version—your natural ESP—to rouse this dormant "sense" of yours. Let's look at the three dimensions of your natural ESP—**E**mpathy, **S**ensitivity, and **P**erceptivity—in more detail.

Empathy

This has finally been given it's rightful place in terms of its importance in establishing rapport and trust. The concept of "emotional intelligence" has highlighted the importance of empathy, which has been likened to our "social radar." It's been described as *sensing what others feel without their saying so*. But it has to be sincere. Because people will rarely disclose how they feel by just using words, we pick up their true feelings in three main ways, with

- **Gestures**
- **Facial expressions**
- **Vocal clues**

These tell the real story about a person's feelings and perspectives. This, of course, is the essence of body language interpretation.

❝ *These tell the real story about a person's feelings.* ❞

Sensitivity

Being sensitive to the clues that are picked up through being empathetic, and acting accordingly after tuning in to another's thoughts, is the next stage. Being sensitive to one's own emotions is also important, as body language is a two-way street. What signals are we **giving out** (through the emotions we are feeling), which, in turn, affects the **receiver's** behavior—and the signals that they then give out to us. (Are we part of the solution, or *part of the problem*?) Having sensitivity requires us to have the capacity for self-awareness.

The mind produces a *thought*.
The thought produces a *feeling*.
That feeling "leaks" out through *body language*.
You read the body language to ascertain a person's feeling—
and hey presto, *you're mind reading*.

Perceptivity

All the information we've translated gives us a heightened sense of perceptivity to the other person's state and their emotions—it results in us having **intuition**. We unconsciously "process" a person's words in the way they were said and with the body language we saw. We are then able to reflect back our perceptions with a much greater skill that should help toward more positive outcomes.

So you can see that this combination of empathy, sensitivity, and perceptivity gives you greater *insight* into the true feelings of others. This is the basis of what we normally refer to as our "intuition"—it's a form of mind reading.

Mind Reading or Thought Reading?

So you can see that observing or reading body language (coupled with our natural intuition) is the way that we try to engage in this process of mind reading. But for you to be convinced that you're perfectly able to do this, it needs a slight amendment—look upon it as reading *thoughts*.

So your ESP skills are truly connected with mind reading (or thought reading, if you prefer). Here's the proof that I hope will truly convince you that at present you exercise this power from day to day: The aim is for you to be even better.

Body Language is a Window to the Mind

We unconsciously use our intuition to pick up signals from another person's posture, facial expression, gestures, tone of voice, eye movements, and much more. And because other people are doing that to us, too, we need self-awareness and empathy to become expert in nonverbal behavior.

Above all we need to be aware of when the behavior occurs, whether it seem at odds with other behavior displayed and, if so, can we see multiple "cues" to support it? We'll discuss this next.

The 3 Cs

It's vital to pay attention to the 3 Cs. No true reading can ever come about without taking into account **Context, Congruence,** and **Clusters**.

❝*It's vital to pay attention to the 3 Cs.*❞

- **Context:** It may seem obvious but you have to look at the context in which behavior occurs. A man returns from an early morning run and walks with his head down and, therefore, has downcast eyes—he is also breathing heavily. Does that indicate boredom, insecurity, or depression? No—he's just come back from a run. That's simply what it indicates.

- **Congruence:** Because visual and vocal body language (nonverbals) make up more than 90 percent of a message, we need to see that the words match the actions—that they are congruent. For example, crossed arms, repeated looking away, and sighing would not be congruent if a woman were telling others that she was enjoying a play at the theatre. We would believe the *visual* message.

- **Clusters:** Because it is obviously unwise to judge a *single* gesture for meaning, we have to look for clusters of gestures to interpret body language. One single gesture can be likened to a word in a sentence. The sentence gives us meaning (that is, a number of gestures together). Make sure you always look for gesture clusters.

ID 10T Error

Oh…and please take heed of our "house" rule in Body Language Rule Number 3—**Warning: ID 10T Error**.

Your Natural Intuition

We're constantly being told that *knowledge is power*. This is never truer than when it applies to self-knowledge. The more you know about yourself, the more you will have the power to control your own thoughts as well as reading others.

It's never too late to learn about body language and it's a skill you can easily become adept at—if you train yourself

to notice more while exercising a bit of caution and taking note of the 3 Cs.

We're all naturally good—potentially—at reading the silent language. After all, that's all there was at the beginning of time. It's just that many people have never bothered to take it a stage   further and become aware of the need to be more observant. Without beating about the bush—it's usually *laziness*. But by just changing your habits of a lifetime and becoming more *aware* of other people's actions—as well as your own—you'll notice a huge difference.

● You'll find that you have a heightened sense of intuition because you're paying more attention to what you see and also to how people are saying things.

● You'll pick up whether a person is in a troubled state and also whether they're telling the truth, a polite lie, or a more serious one.

● Your sharpened senses and powers of perception will allow you to tune in to other people's thoughts.

Thankfully, because you were born with that wonderful capacity for intuition, you can already tell if someone is giving out signals that spell out to you happy, miserable, anxious, or relaxed. From a distance you can deduce whether people are having an argument, a friendly conversation, or are in the throes of a mad, passionate love affair, just from observing **posture**, **gestures**, and **facial expressions**.

You pick up all this information unconsciously. What would happen if you made a *conscious* decision to observe people more carefully? How proficient a reader of body language or of people's minds would you be then? You just need to know what to look for. So let's just take it a stage further over the course of these 7 Lessons.

1

Language of the Mind and Body

No doubt over the years, you've picked up on the various ways we all communicate—facial expressions, the way we stand or sit, gestures such as crossing our arms in a particular way, the position or tilt of the head, or direction of the eyes. All of these movements express something—even without accompanying speech. How you perform these movements contributes to creating the image that you present and determines people's perceptions of you.

It's very rare for any of us, when we're talking to people, to believe that our words alone can convey the right message.

We may smile or grimace, avert our gaze at times, stand close or at a distance, touch (or not), and use other nonverbal communication to add weight to our message. A number of surveys over the past 50 years have provided a body of evidence (did I say "body"—it's crept in again) to show that it is body language—or nonverbal messages—that powerfully communicate the following:

- **Acceptance** and **rejection**
- **Liking** and **disliking**

- **Interest** and **boredom**
- **Truth** and **deception**

Wouldn't it be good to identify all these in your interactions with other people? It would certainly save a lot of time and heartache, and also provide you with feedback that might enable you to salvage a situation in some cases.

So, a good awareness of body language provides practical insights into improving your interactions with other people in most situations. Friends, family, work colleagues, customers, clients, at job interviews, with strangers—it's an exhaustive list.

Communicating with the Silent Language

Quite naturally, because of our daily interactions with people involving the spoken word, we've been educated to believe that language skills—or more precisely, words—are of paramount importance. They are: But the "silent" language is of equal importance—if not more.

"The "silent" language is of equal importance."

We communicate with our:

- **Dress**
- **Posture**
- **Facial expression**
- **Eye contact**
- **Hand, arm, and leg movements**
- **Bodily tension**
- **Spatial distance**

- **Touch**
- **Voice (tone, pace, and inflection)**

Because we communicate in this "silent" language from the **subconscious**, it follows that as a true indicator of our feelings, it conveys more than the spoken word. Gestures are very effective in delivering messages in the form of images *in a way that speech is unable to do*. It follows that when gestures and words are used simultaneously, this is the most effective method of communication. We choose gestures to communicate our message, but our body throws out signals that are beyond our conscious awareness *(and that's where the trouble starts)*.

It's time to haul out the statistics relating to the ground-breaking— and still highly influential—study conducted in 1971 by social psychologist Professor Albert Mehrabian of the University of Los Angeles (UCLA). He looked at the relative strengths of verbal and nonverbal messages in face-to-face encounters and devised a communication model **that has stood the test of time**. It has come to be regarded almost as a template in understanding how people derive *meaning* from another person's message.

The research revealed three elements in any communication message: **body language**, **voice**, and **words**. Mehrabian came up with the famous **55**, **38**, and **7** model that reveals that

- 55 percent of the meaning in any message comes from the **visual** body language (gestures, posture, facial expressions).
- 38 percent of the meaning is derived from the nonverbal element of speech **(vocal)**—in other words, the way in which the words are delivered—tone, pitch, pace.
- 7 percent of the meaning comes from the actual **words** (content).

> **BODY WISE**
>
> 93 percent of our message is conveyed by the language of the **body** (including **voice**).

This leads to a startling conclusion:

- This means that in those vital 20 seconds to 3 minutes that we have when people form a first impression, this is determined mainly from how we *present* ourselves and how we *say* things rather than *what* we say (content).
- If there is a *mismatch* between the words and the way they are delivered, we tend to believe the *delivery* rather than the words (that is, the *highest* figure in this list).
- Therefore body language enables us to look *beyond* the words that are used and get to the hidden **silent** message that is conveyed (often through the subconscious).

So Mehrabian's classic research tells us that your impact boils down to three factors:

1 **HOW YOU *LOOK***

2 **HOW YOU *SOUND***

3 **WHAT YOU *SAY***

In short—**body language speaks louder than words!**

What did the research reveal? Well—essentially it was this:

> If your 55 percent—visual body language—is not good, *they're not even going to stick around* (excuse the vernacular) to listen to the 45 percent !

> ## WARNING
>
> Over the decades, some people, after learning about the 55, 38, 7 study (and other more recent studies that broadly confirm these figures), have *misinterpreted* these groundbreaking findings. They've concluded that words are not that important and that as long as you look confident, project the right impression, dress to kill and then deliver your *ill-construed* words with the right seductive pitch and tone of voice—the world's your oyster. (A classic illustration of the maxim that "no information is better than *misinformation*.")
>
> So they've concluded that if words are worth less than 10 per-cent in your interactions in terms of successfully engaging with people, then actual words are not that important.
>
> **Incorrect**. That's not what the study showed. When you read this in the future—and you're bound to come across it in a magazine in some guise or another—take a deep breath.

Even if your audience sticks around, if your 38 percent (the way that you speak) turns them off, they won't take in or comprehend the 7 percent (the actual words) and they're gone—**mentally if not physically**. That's what the research findings showed.

How many times have you thought (or said)—at a party, at work, on a date—that things were looking good *"until he opened his mouth."* (Have you ever seen any of those TV programs on speed dating?)

Make no mistake: The words are important. Our objective is to get the person to *want* to listen to us in the first place. Even if you consider yourself to be oozing with charisma without saying a word—words are important. And of course, how you say them is equally as important.

❝ *Get the person to want to listen to you in the first place.* **❞**

It's generally accepted by most researchers that

- Words are used to communicate *information.*
- Body language (or nonverbals) conveys *attitudes, feelings, and emotions*.

(We'll discuss how the way words are voiced, along with display attitudes, feelings, and emotions, in Lesson 3, "Listening," when we talk about the nonverbal aspect of speech—**paralanguage**.)

Sometimes body language is used as an alternative medium for verbal messages (think about Norma Desmond's "With one look I put words to shame…" from *Sunset Boulevard*).

On the basis of how you score in the three factors previously listed, people will make decisions as to

- Whether they like you
- Whether they trust you
- Whether to go on a date with you
- Whether to do business with you

and bluntly—**whether to have anything to do with you at all!**

CAUTION

> Many people spend time trying to become expert in decoding the body language of other people, and they still don't improve their personal and work relationships. Why? Because they forget to look at their *own* body language.

A lot of relationships are formed or dissolved **in the first 3 minutes of an encounter**. It's the gut instinct or intuition from the subconscious that is picking up on the nonverbals to decide whether it's a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

Your amicable words mean nothing if your body seems to be saying something different. We're constantly making impressions (as sender) for other people to receive and receiving impressions (as receiver) about other people. It's two-way traffic.

We'll evaluate, through our sixth sense, how we feel about a person, by the way they express themselves through their body. It's not even a *rational* decision on our part. Call it intuition. This quote sums it up beautifully:

There is a road from the eye to the heart
that does not go through the intellect.

GK Chesterton

Quit focusing about *why* you do something with your body (facial expression, eyes, gesture). Think—from a visual viewpoint—*how* it appears to *other* people and, more importantly, *is that what you wanted to convey?*

The first impression sticks—for better or worse. You may remember the shampoo commercial on television many years ago: *You never get a second chance to make a first impression.* Never was there a truer maxim.

❝ *The first impression sticks—for better or worse.* **❞**

BODY WISE

As with toothpaste, it's easier to let negative first impressions out of the tube than to squeeze them back in.

Make sure people are reading you correctly. If you look the part and your nonverbal display is consistent, your words will be reinforced and your audience will have confidence and trust in what you're saying and will want to hear more.

Kinesics

Way back in 1872 Charles Darwin, known for his theory of evolution, wrote his groundbreaking *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. It wasn't until the middle half of the following century that further serious scientific research started again.

One of the early pioneers of body language was Ray Birdwhistell, an American anthropologist who worked in the 1950s. He called this silent communication "kinesics" because of its study into the way that various body parts or the entire body play a key role in communicating a message.

Our gestures, which broadly include movement, postures, and expressions, transmit messages while the mouth is busily sending out the carefully crafted (or otherwise) words. The other giant of the body language movement, zoologist Dr. Desmond Morris, has defined a gesture as *"any action that sends a visual signal to an onlooker…and communicates some piece information to them."* This can be either deliberate or incidental. A lot of our incidental gestures are ones that we would prefer to conceal. For example, the head-on-hands during a less than exciting training session or the second half of a dull play. Quite often we may not be consciously aware of adopting a gesture (as it is not deliberate), but this provider of mood information sends out a signal to the onlooker, and the meaning of it is read.

The kinesic model was further developed by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen (University of California, 1970)—we shall be referring to some of their research on facial expressions in Lesson 2, "Looking,"—who subdivided kinesics into five broad areas that provide a convenient shorthand for us.

1 Illustrators

These tend to be gestures that **accompany** speech to create a visual supporting message that describes or reinforces your message, and more often than not are subconscious in their origin. For example you might gesture with a rising upward movement of your upturned palm as you describe how house prices have gone up in the past 10 years.

2 Emblems

These usually **replace** words—an obvious one is the thumbs-up. In the relevant contexts and in the various

cultures, they are easily understood by the receiver. A little cautionary note. You're more likely to be confused with these in different parts of the world where, if the emblem exists, it can mean something completely different to what you intended. You could end up with

- A village bride
- A pack of mules
- A black eye
- Or all three—if you're on a roll!

3 Affect displays

These are movements that tend to *give away* your emotions, positive or negative, and are usually unconscious. These would include **facial expressions**, **gestures associated with the limbs**, **body posture**, and **movement**. We'll be talking a lot about these as they reveal much about how we are feeling—to other people and also to ourselves. They constitute the *leakage* that in many cases we'd rather hide.

4 Adaptors

Similar to affect displays, adaptors are a *mood indicator* and are difficult to consciously control, making them a good barometer of someone's true feelings, be they positive or negative. They indicate whether the person is lying or engaging in a more serious form of deception. Adaptors include switches in posture and movements (alter-adaptors), actions that are directed *toward* the body such as rubbing or touching the face (self-adaptors), and actions like chewing a pencil, removing spectacles, or fiddling with jewelry (object-adaptors).

❝*Adaptors include switches in posture and movements.*❞

5 Regulators

These are movements related to our function of *speaking* or *listening* and also indications of our intentions. (We'll discuss intention movements later.) Head nods, eye contact, and shifts of body position come under this category.

BODY WISE

As you sit through the other Lessons please remember to interpret everything from *two* angles—with both hats on. Don't forget—you're a receiver and a transmitter of body language.

Always ask yourself two questions:

1 What signals are people sending out (that I need to *decode*)?
2 What signals am I sending out (are they what I *intended*)?

Let's just accept from the start that

- What people say is quite often at odds with what they *really* think or feel.
- As a receiver of information, it's up to you to **interpret** the body signals to ascertain the *true* meaning of the message.

This can significantly affect the outcome.

When you communicate with others you need to know

- Whether you are sending out good **positive** body signals.

- That as a sender of information, you have the self-awareness to recognize and eliminate any **negative** body language that delivers the *wrong* message.

This can significantly affect the outcome.

Conscious or Unconscious?

So, before we carry on, here's a recap about the role of body language in our personal interactions with other people. In addition to spontaneous behavior, body language is something that we can use *purposefully* to influence an interaction.

All of us go about our daily lives transmitting messages to the world through our body language. But remember these two points as you go along:

1 Some of these gestures are deliberate (and, therefore, **conscious**).
2 Many gestures are beyond our control and are due to our physiology (and, therefore, **unconscious**).

What to Look for—the Big Two

Let's simplify things right at the outset with some key points. These are the two things you want to be aware of at all times during any interaction—you want to know whether the people you are with are showing signs of

1 **Comfort or discomfort (or anxiety)**
2 **Open body language or closed body language**

Use this as a shorthand for reading body language from now on—and forever! Please commit it to memory.

This shorthand process will help you immensely because whenever you're with people, your newly trained eye will immediately focus on these two points, which validate each other:

- Do I detect comfort in this person's demeanor—or discomfort?
- Is their body language open—or is it closed?

Open or Closed?

The clues as to whether the person is comfortable would be validated by **open body language**. Discomfort, meaning any kind of negative state such as *anxiety, fear, nervousness,* and *hostility,* would be validated by **closed body language**.

So already we've taken a huge stride in recognizing a person's emotional state. Of course, it's not the difficulty of this state that's the problem for most people. It's usually laziness or lack of awareness—*or both.*

❝ *We've taken a huge stride in recognizing a person's emotional state.* ❞

TRY IT

From today make a point of sharpening up your mind-reading skills by looking to really see and listening to really hear. Begin by trying to recognize open and closed body language with everybody you come into contact with.

We've spoken about gestures and the need to base interpretation on clusters rather than trying to work things out from one solitary signal. *In virtually every encounter you have with other people it's of immense importance to observe the clusters that signify either open or closed body language*.

Of course the terminology speaks for itself when we consider our everyday language. Who's more welcoming? The person who says, "I'm open to offers," or the one who says, "This is non-negotiable"; or the boss who says, "Pop in anytime if you have a problem, my door is always open," or "…my door is always closed!"

Open body language is **welcoming**, **relaxed**, and **attentive**. It signifies a lack of barriers of any sort, whether they be physical or extending from your own body. Your body is open and exposed and you're suggesting that you're vulnerable to others but you're comfortable about it. **Your hands are usually in view, possibly with exposed palms, which signifies submissiveness, and your legs and posture are free**, **and easy and eye contact is good**. Everything indicates a positive state of affairs.

Closed body language is a cluster of gestures, movements and posture that **brings the body in on itself**. If you're experiencing the "fight or flight" situation when you're threatened in some way, the tendency is to make the body appear smaller and to look for barriers to shield you from the threat.

Bringing the limbs **close in to the body** achieves the closed effect and a **barrier** can be put up by crossing the arms. This closed position is often used when you want to show that you're not a threat to the other person (some people of a more introverted nature may adopt this pose) and show when you are uncomfortable in being in the situation you are in, or being with a particular person. **Not much eye**

contact and tense shoulders and limbs that are crossed (folded arms and legs) typify this negative situation.

Just take a moment to consider what we've just discussed. What's your "signature" position. **Do you exhibit these two types of body position in different situations?** Bet you do.

TRY IT

Put yourself in a closed body position. Note how it changes your mood. The mind affects the body—*but the body also affects the mind.* Now adopt an open position. See how your mood changes.

Observe other people in these two positions and note how you perceive them—and their message. Is it deliberate or unconscious? Can you think of people in your life (work or personal) who display these two types of positions? Does it affect how you respond to them?

BODY WISE

Open body language is welcoming and relaxed, whereas closed brings the limbs close in to the body.

Displacement Activities and Self-Comfort Gestures

These are the main sources in our quest to read people better. We look for activities that reveal the clues to a person's state of mind—and accordingly how the relationship may develop. But we cannot take single gestures in isolation: This is where people often become stuck.

❝*We cannot take single gestures in isolation.*❞

Gestures have been likened to a single word in a sentence. **You can't make meaning or sense from a single word, but when words are put together with others to form a sentence, then we have meaning**. It's like that with body language. We piece together a number of clues that may point to the same thing. This is why we talk of clusters. Identifying these leads us to a certain conclusion.

So can we really say just because a person touches their nose when asked a certain question that they're lying; that when someone shifts position while sitting that they're feeling nervous; that folded arms indicate boredom with the listener; or that interlocking ankles are hiding aggression? **Of course not.** As single isolated gestures they indicate nothing. If all of these actions occur during an interaction with someone (a cluster of signals), then there's a good chance that there is a negative attitude from this person, and so it might be a good time to change tack and try to get to the root of the dissatisfaction.

It could be you, your message, or the environment (context) that is causing the problem. Many people mistakenly go through life thinking that they're good at reading people's nonverbal signals. They'll take a single action by

another person and, lacking the requisite empathy to dig further, they'll ascribe it to a particular feeling—with no backup information. Needless to say, these people may end up antagonizing others *("No I'm not bored with what you're telling me; I'm just tired"…"No you're not—you're bored, I can tell."…"Will you just leave it for now….")*

So you need a lot of information to make a judgment about a person's attitudes. It's one step along a path in which you're looking for clues. Hasty and incomplete information leads to poor readings.

CHAT ROOM

Q I'd just like to ask a general question before we move on through the Lessons. You know when you meet somebody for the first time and they appear trustworthy and friendly. And then with someone else you get the opposite; you don't trust the person as soon as you begin a conversation. Is that because of body language?

It may not be consciously apparent to you at the time, but your gut feeling or intuition is telling you that whatever's being said by both people may be perfectly okay; it's just that with the second person you're getting mixed messages. Their verbal and body language signals don't mesh. Some kind of involuntary signal, from their face, their posture, or a gesture, sends you a subconscious message that you don't feel comfortable about them. We'll explore all this later.

Q Are we saying that the brain is capable of seeing beyond the reach of the traditional five senses, into people's minds?

Let's put it this way. In any interaction with another person, your brain takes in a vast amount of information from her body language and the vocal aspect of body language—paralanguage. The senses send back this information to your subconscious where it manipulates data (for want of a better term) received with your life experiences, to form that gut feeling or intuition we just spoke about. It then sends this to your conscious brain that makes a decision as to how you feel and respond.

Q Are some people naturally better at picking up signals and "reading" people?

Yes. Just like some of us are naturally better at playing a sport or a musical instrument, or singing or dancing. But it doesn't mean we can't learn these skills. We may not match up to the "gifted" few, but we can certainly be proficient—we just may have to practice more. And of course you know what happens the more we practice something—suddenly we're good.

Q Does that mean we're all going to be body language wizards at the end of these 7 Lessons?

Of course you can be—and I hope that's what the outcome is. If you start really seeing and really listening—backed up with everything that we'll have covered—you will sharpen up your own self-awareness, and then you'll certainly see the magic.

Q So we've got to remember some figures at all times, is that right? 54…30 something….

Don't worry—it's okay: 55, 38, 7. You will remember these, I guarantee, by the end of the final Lesson. Just be aware of the reason why a lot of us fall by the wayside in our relationships with other people. By the way, when we talk about relationships we're not just talking about social and affairs of the heart. We're talking any relationship whether it's with acquaintances, working relationships, service providers, business clients—you name it. We all have the capacity to attract or repel people.

Q So this first-impression phenomenon that we're always being told about is something we should take seriously?

Well it's not a phenomenon—it's an instinctive dislike and distrust between one person and another, and the information that decides this is communicated in a very short space of time. Your brain computes a lot of information in an instant.

Q I think we've got the message. Body language is all about picking up information on a subconscious level, and that tells the truth better than any words. Is that it?

Couldn't have put it better myself.

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