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BODY LANGUAGE

How to know what's REALLY being said

BY THE NO. 1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JAMES BORG

Body Language

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How to know what's REALLY
being said

2nd edition

JAMES BORG

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'From the moment I picked up your book until I laid it down,
I was convulsed with laughter. Some day I intend reading it.'

Groucho Marx

Preface to 2nd edition

Well here it is: the expanded and updated edition which I hope may enlighten you and raise your awareness of this fascinating topic. As with the other two books that form the 'trilogy', the aim is to inform, educate and entertain.

Communication is such an important topic that is essential to our well-being; and most of it is not from what we say. *How* we say it as well as the *postures* and *gestures* we use is the 'magic' solution.

Even in the last few years there has been more focus on observing the body language of politicians, 'celebrities', sports-people and people in the workplace. On the flip side there is the growing realisation that our own body language has to send the right message too; if we're to communicate our intentions accurately.

I was 'humbled' to receive an award for this book: Winner of the BAA (British Airports Authority) 'BEST NON-FICTION TRAVEL READ AWARD 2009'.

From a short-list of six books (the odds were slightly lessened by the inclusion of another book of mine, *Persuasion*, within the six!), more than 23,000 members of the public cast their votes in a month-long process.

If any of you pick up this new edition, I would like to express my thanks.

Once again – enjoy the 'journey'.

JB

Author's note

It's been famously said that when writing a book 'you don't choose your subject; your subject chooses you'. Certainly that was the case with my previous books that form the 'trilogy': *Persuasion* and *Mind Power*. I've spent a lifetime studying persuasion, how the mind works and body language: both academically and in my working life where *observation skills* and *self-awareness* were (and still are) crucial to achieving positive outcomes and an understanding of other people.

Interest in non-verbal behaviour, or 'body language', has grown rapidly in recent years because in this fast-paced and time-poor world we're constantly judged on *first impressions*. **People are making snap decisions as to whether they trust us, like us, want to work with us, have a love affair with us – and much more.** As research continually points out, words alone don't provide the whole picture. It is in the nature of the human condition that we communicate more through the body than merely through language.

Every day we constantly have to *interpret* what another person's body language is telling us – as well as *controlling* our own to create the right impression. Two-way traffic!

You may have come across the oft-cited study in the 1970s which concluded that more than 90 per cent of meaning in any interaction is derived from non-verbal cues – the manner in which your body 'talks' and also the way that you *say* things (vocal) – and just a mere 7 per cent from the *words* you actually speak.

We can play around with the actual figures of course, but the fundamental point is that the overwhelming meaning of a message, when communicating with others, comes from an unconscious display of the ‘silent’ language; this either reinforces or detracts from the words being used. Research has shown that the most successful people, *in all walks of life*, are ‘intuitive’ in deciphering these signals.

‘All the world’s a stage’

Actors have to be masters of body language in order to convince us to believe in the role they are playing while at the same time helping us to ‘suspend our disbelief’ (since it’s not real life) so that we can engage with and put our *own* emotions into the performance. When we see mannerisms and gestures that ring true to a particular emotion, or what’s being said or felt, we unconsciously accept the ‘message’ and go along with the make-believe – good acting!

Just recently I noted down an excerpt from a review of a play in London’s West End:

. . . I believed in her persona. The body language and demeanour and status were all well observed . . . she combines dance and theatre to convey emotions and thoughts so that the audience is able to interpret without the need of words.

Since we’re all acting out certain ‘roles’ in everyday life, both in our personal lives and especially at work, body language is the way in which our bodies communicate our own or a ‘character’s’ attitudes. There’s nothing ‘false’ about it – as Shakespeare told us:

**All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.**

(As You Like It)

The 'magic' of body-reading

Just like a professional actor, when you're acting out your role in everyday life you have to make sure your body language is **appropriate** for the character you're playing, otherwise your **'performance'** is not congruent and your message not believable.

Certainly, this was brought home to me as a youngster, fascinated by magic and the psychology behind its presentation. After painstakingly acquiring magical knowledge and then being let loose to perform 'effects' (conventional and 'mind-reading') I was eventually accepted as one of the youngest ever members of the Magic Circle. There the magicians' dictum, courtesy of the famous Robert Houdin (from whom the great Houdini had taken his name) was drilled into me: 'A magician is an *actor*, playing the *part* of a magician.'

What was that all about? Well, I was told that, **since most communication is conveyed through your demeanour – in posture, gestures, eye contact, voice, confidence – just like any other 'actor' in the performing arts, you had to become an expert in conveying the right impression – to be 'believable'**. Your body language had to reinforce the part that you were playing. That separated the good performer from the mediocre – presentation was all.

Even more to the point – just to complicate things for this youngster – the discipline of magic that was of interest to me was not conventional magic but 'mind-magic' or **mind-reading**. This meant that **'tuning in' to other people's thoughts and being able to 'read' body language (coupled with certain 'magical' techniques of course!)** was essential in order to perform the *miracle*. So there was a double necessity for me in acquiring body language knowledge and skills. I'd chosen that branch of magic – mind-reading and 'mind-magic' – that relied, in part, on being able to read body language well.

What people do with their bodies is a window to their subconscious thoughts, so close observation is the key to reading minds. Thus began a lifelong journey in honing

perception skills and becoming more self-aware. My own body language had to be right too, in order for an audience to suspend their disbelief and accept that their minds (or thoughts) were being ‘read’.

All this brought home to me two important things:

- 1 In real life we’re constantly trying to *read minds* by observing body language. We’re all engaging in mind-reading in one way or another.
- 2 Body language is a *two-way street*. You need to be aware of:
 - your *own* body language – and the messages you are giving out (after all other people are ‘reading’ you)
 - how to ‘read’ the body language of *others* to determine the messages they are giving out.

Years of performing ‘mind-reading acts’ honed and furthered my interest in body language. Academic study in psychology and related fields meant that when I was let loose in the world of work, the awareness, thankfully, was already there.

Becoming ‘fluent’ in body language

After we’ve been through the 7 Lessons you’ll have all the tools you need to become an accomplished reader and user of body language. Our aim is therefore twofold:

- 1 To develop the self-awareness you need to **control** your own body language so that it delivers the **right** outcome for you.
- 2 To sharpen your senses so that you can **read** body language in others and **react** in the appropriate way.

After all, if you’re trying to get inside the mind of the other person – by observing what’s happening on the outside – *they’ll be doing the same to you*. So you’ll need to use the right body language to convey the impression that you mean to make – as opposed to leaving it entirely to your subconscious, *as you’ve done in the past*.

You'll become an adept mind-reader and have greater success in fathoming what a person's really thinking. All you'll need is to be able to decipher gestures that you previously **paid no attention to** (both the subtle and the blindingly obvious), and also to be aware of your **own** gestures and how they might be *provoking* a reciprocal gesture in the other person.

I've cut out a lot of the 'peripheral' information that scientists have discovered – sometimes it's not worth 'dissecting' things for the sake of it – to concentrate on what is *practical*. After you've absorbed the 7 Lessons and then combined them with daily practice you'll be transformed into a body language 'wiz'.

In conclusion

At the end of the 7 Lessons you should find you have raised your awareness to the extent that you:

- become more intuitive in deciphering *other* people's body signals
- are aware of your *own* 'bodytalk'.

Also you will be able to *control* it and *use* it to great advantage to enhance your own communication style – with friends, strangers, family, work colleagues, customers, clients.

This is a book for everybody – whatever you do, if you have contact with other people (few of us can be excluded from this category) and you want to know how to read people better and simultaneously make yourself more effective in conveying the impression you intended to create, then read on.

So here it is. This is for you: the person *in a hurry* – enjoy the journey!

James Borg

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

Leonardo da Vinci

Introduction

If you could read my mind...the 7 Ls

There can be few things more fascinating to men and women than the language displayed by other people's bodies – as well as their own. 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 we'll see, it's essential to piece together a number of behaviours in order to make an accurate reading. Otherwise you'll fall victim to **ID 10T errors** all the time (more about that later).

First of all, go back and take a look at the da Vinci quote on page xiv. You may recognise yourself – do you go about your life with your senses 'dulled'?

It's not easy to fake body language. The human body is comprised 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 summarise 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 to have a far better chance of achieving the outcome you're after.
- Being able to read the body language (or non-verbals) of others allows you to modify and shape your message based on your receiving of subtle positive or negative signals during your interaction.

BODY WISE



Feelings are communicated more by non-verbals than by a person's words.

Body language will always be the most trusted indicator for conveying:

- feelings
- attitudes
- 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 fulfils the role of **feelings**.

It's an inescapable fact that our non-verbal 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 subconscious 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 for the listener.

So when we speak and accompany 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 causes doubt on the part of the listener. It could just be a bad habit which 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, constantly shifting in the chair while talking.** These may all just be bad habits rather than gestures denoting a specific feeling relating to the message. But the point is that 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' behaviour knowledge about you (so they won't know that a particular gesture is a natural part of your demeanour). **All they can go on is what they see or hear.**

First impressions are powerful – and difficult to change.

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 in order 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 non-verbal 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. Even Leonardo da Vinci in the 16th century, despite his other considerable talents, was interested in developing his 'interpersonal intelligence' and improving his senses. He advised:

When you are out for a walk, see to it that you watch and consider other men's postures and actions as they talk, argue, laugh or scuffle; their own actions and those of their supporters and onlookers.

Leonardo da Vinci

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.



Groucho Marx

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 humour 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 are using during any interaction with people, they are, whether we like it or not, always accompanied by bodytalk that can reveal much *more* than the spoken word. Yet, most people go about their business in all the activities of their daily life wholly unaware that they are **receivers and senders** of non-verbal language.

Small wonder, if you consider that around 95 per cent 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 per cent to complete the picture.

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**.

Recognise 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?

Self-analysis

- Do you find that you're subconsciously turning people off?
- Are you – again subconsciously – giving off signals that say you're untrustworthy?
- Do you find it difficult to persuade people to change an attitude or behaviour?
- 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.

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.

Be aware that everything we discuss in our 7 Lessons applies at two levels: (1) An analysis of your own body language (what signals do I *send* out?) (2) On the flip side, interpreting the signals that you *receive* from others.

Emotions and feelings

Recognising a person's emotions or feelings is your key to people-reading. **Emotions are conveyed more clearly through body language than through speech.** You're probably familiar with the term '**emotional intelligence**' which, 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 recognised and the message is this:

- 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.

“*Five emotional competencies or skills have been recognised*”

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

Start with yourself

You probably are aware of these things subliminally, but in the cut and thrust of everyday life it's easy to take short cuts 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 out for the roof damage in the recent storm. The point is that it’s up to you as the ‘receiver’ to try to engage their 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 and **that’s what you’ll be learning how to do**.

The subject of extra sensory perception (ESP) always arouses strong emotions. But you’ll be using a different version – your natural ESP – in order to rouse this dormant ‘sense’ of yours. Let’s look at the three dimensions of your natural ESP – Empathy, Sensitivity and Perceptivity – in more detail.

Empathy

This has finally been given its 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 them saying so*. But it has to be sincere. Since people will rarely disclose how they feel by just using words, we pick up their true feelings in three main ways, by:

- **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 because 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** behaviour – 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.

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 subconsciously ‘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, which should help towards 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 in order 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:

- 1 The mind produces a *thought*.
- 2 The thought produces a *feeling*.
- 3 That feeling ‘leaks’ out through *body language*.
- 4 You read the body language (to ascertain a person’s feeling).
- 5 Hey presto, *you’re mind-reading*.

Body language is a window to the mind

We subconsciously use our intuition to pick up signals from another person’s posture, facial expression, gestures, tone of voice, eye movements and much more. And since other people are doing that to us too, we need self-awareness and empathy to become expert in non-verbal behaviour.

Above all we need to be aware of when the behaviour occurs, whether it seems at odds with other behaviour 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 behaviour 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 what it indicates.
- **Congruence.** Since visual and vocal body language (non-verbals) make up more than 90 per cent 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 was 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 (i.e. a number of gestures together). Make sure you always look for gesture clusters.

ID 10T error

Oh . . . and please take heed of Body Language Rule Number 3 – **Warning: ID 10T error.**

The two-way process of body language is one of:

- 1 **transmission** (by one person) and then
- 2 **interpretation** (by the other person).

So:

- A reads the body language ‘message’ of B (transmission and interpretation).
- A responds with his own body language signals to B (all well and good).
- B reads A’s signals and responds with her own (all well and good).
- A **misinterprets** the signals from B.

The result – the breakdown in communication means that apart from *transmission* and *interpretation* there is a *third* element prevalent in non-verbal communication – **misinterpretation**.

So, as you’ll see throughout the book, the reading of this silent language requires us to look for *clusters* of information (as opposed to one cue) to support our interpretation. Failure to do this will result in ID 10T errors.

This will become apparent to you as you progress through the stages.

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 if 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 subconsciously. 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 take it a stage further over the course of these 7 Lessons.

Lesson 3

'There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture.'

William Shakespeare

Listening

We spend most of our lives listening. Your relationships – and the quality of them – are, for the most part, determined by your skills in listening. In fact, in the whole communication process it's your skills as a listener that determine your effectiveness.

During any interaction there's a dual status that you occupy. At times you're either:

- listener *or*
- speaker.

If you're typical of most people (hand-on-heart time) you prefer to be talking rather than listening. As Larry King, the former US television talk show host for CNN, once put it: *'everybody's fighting for airtime'*. Noted for his listening 'style' as he interviews celebrities, politicians and businesspeople every day, he also commented that many other interviewers prefer lecturing rather than listening.

In our own everyday lives the majority of us love to hear ourselves talk and don't really care to listen unless it involves 'us'. Of course there will always, fortunately, be exceptions and you probably find yourself quite attracted to these people.

“The majority of us love to hear ourselves talk”

Active listening

When a person is speaking to you – and you occupy the role of listener – **do you show with your body that you are listening?** That you're present? That you understand what they're saying (even if you may disagree)?

People who engage in what has come to be known as ‘active listening’ not only listen, but also are *seen* to be listening.

The elements of any speaker’s message comprises of:

- the words spoken
- the body language (visual)
- the non-verbal ‘paralanguage’ (auditory).

As we stressed earlier, of course words are important, but people make a decision about you and your message first and then decide whether or not to stay around and continue with any interaction. This applies to life and all its relationships. The message is usually interpreted through the visual body language and *listening between the lines*.

Visual and vocal cues

What do we mean by listening between the lines? It’s tuning in to the **vocal** aspect of body language – in other words, **pitch, tone, volume, rhythm, rate of speaking and all those paralinguistic clues that reveal more than the words themselves** (we’ll be looking at this later in this Lesson).

Time and time again, all the surveys show that the most charismatic, successful – or just plain popular – people are great listeners; and, more importantly, they *show* it. How do they do it? **Through body language**. Their empathy shines through and they’re sensitive enough to know when to speak and when to listen – and, more importantly, they *show* that they’re listening with their whole body. Result – rapport.

These people are also empathetic and look to see *beyond the words* that are spoken and listen ‘between the lines’.

They tune in to that second element of non-verbal language that makes up – along with the visual – more than 90 per cent of the meaning in any message (the 38 per cent, remember?). **How you say the words – that vocal element.**

We typically listen to the words that are being uttered but fail to tune in to the emotional meaning. If you listen with all your senses you'll be more attuned to engaging your 'sixth sense', or 'intuition' or 'gut feeling', call it what you will. We'll be talking about this *paralanguage* later in this Lesson.

TRY IT

The next time you're listening to somebody face to face, try to suspend your own thoughts and don't think about formulating your reply. See if you hear and remember more. Then, when you've graduated from that, try to train yourself to listen to the 'paralanguage' – the way that things are said. Eventually, it will become your listening 'style'.

It's all too easy to blame the listener or 'audience' in a meeting or social setting when they disagree, or – in your eyes – have missed the point. Your 'performance' has not struck the right chord – **you didn't pick up the body language signals that suggested doubt, uncertainty or hostility on their part, and so your lack of awareness precluded you from even trying to rectify the situation.**

Listening with all your senses

Listening and responding in a way that helps you to understand another person's perspective – and at the same time shows that you are truly listening to them – is the first stage of establishing *rappport*. Yet it would not be unkind to suggest that most of us are poor – no, let's be generous here – terrible listeners.

“*Most of us are terrible listeners*”

Equally, it would not be an exaggeration to say that for the majority of people, their lives are ruined by poor listening – and that goes for listening to words said, as well as the way that they're said and the all-important body language that accompanies it.

We all have a tendency to ‘switch off’ or ‘drift off’ if we’re subjected to a bout of listening without being able to talk ourselves. Yet it’s important that we listen using all our senses since we know that the true message is often not relayed through the **words** that are being spoken.

There is a developmental condition on the autism spectrum known as **Asperger’s syndrome** and those afflicted have great trouble listening and also picking up on the body language of others. Like all autistics they have poor social skills and so there is a difficulty in interacting with others. Their inability to read facial expressions and their poor eye contact means they are oblivious to the feelings of others. The situation is made worse by the fact that the lack of ability to pick up on the vocal element of body language, tone of voice, means that the different nuances and meaning of words – based on the tone of voice used – is completely lost.

Hearing and listening

Most of us – and it’s a problem that stems from childhood confuse *hearing* with *listening*. Time to make you feel a little guilty now. Are you aware of the difference? Well, let’s start by saying this:

- one is a *physiological* process
- the other is a *psychological* process.

Hearing is an auditory activity in which the sensory process through the ears makes a journey to the brain – a physiological approach. Listening involves the interpretation and understanding of a message after it’s been through the hearing process – a psychological activity that makes sense of what’s been heard. The two processes work together to give meaning.

It also means that it’s possible to hear something without actually listening to it. You know the situation well – it probably happened to you at school. You’re busy daydreaming with half your attention given to the teacher who’s talking about ‘stalactites’ that grow from the ceilings of caves, interrupting

your thoughts about last night's episode of *Sex and the City*. The teacher, noticing your slouched posture, asks you to repeat what she just said and you reply, with a startle: 'stalactites grow from the ceiling'.

Phew . . . Out of trouble for now, but you didn't take in the meaning, you just recited it while it stayed in your short-term memory and it will dissolve in the next 50 seconds or so – to be forgotten. There's no psychological activity of true listening and making meaning and processing, and therefore 'storing' the information. You were merely 'hearing'.

So, I think we've established that listening is something we all take for granted. In reality it's not that easy setting aside the concentration even to listen to the words. But, as we know, it's important to listen not only to the words, **but also to how they're said** – listening to all those paralinguistic cues. Also, we have to observe what we see – **and show that we're listening**.

'Listening' body language

So let's have a look at 'listening' body language:

- making good eye contact
- using head movements
- mirroring (in a natural way) body language.

We've spoken about eye contact in the previous Lesson. You're well aware of the unwritten rules of eye contact etiquette. Eye contact helps a speaker to be confident that they're being heard and that you're taking an interest. Nobody likes engaging in a conversation with a person whose eyes are continually darting around (cocktail party style). That's why people who are good with their eye contact are perceived as more likeable and interesting.

Head movements are an interesting area in relation to encouraging people to speak and generating rapport. It's mainly through the 'head nod'. Five different 'yes' types of nod have been identified:

- the encouraging nod ('Yes, how fascinating')
- the acknowledgement nod ('Yes, I'm still listening')
- the understanding nod ('Yes, I see what you mean')
- the factual nod ('Yes, that is correct')
- the agreement nod ('Yes, I will').

The bowing action of the nod appears to be an inborn action, just like the head shake. The head shake, signifying no, is thought to stem from our time as babies when the negative response to being spoon fed is to turn the head first to one side and then to the other.

“‘The nod appears to be an inborn action’”

Many people fail to develop rapport with others by not showing through the body (usually a head nod) that they are fully engaged. As we saw above, there are five possible messages we can convey to the speaker. It's a simple action and as a gesture performed by the listener it can help the conversation to flow.

Lack of nodding (not listening with your body) can stifle a conversation because the speaker may think one of two things:

- You're not paying attention to what they're saying.
- You're not interested.

BODY WISE



Studies show that listeners who engage in repeated nodding activity tend to elicit as much as *four times* more information from a speaker compared to when there is no head activity.

A tip: Check the direction of gaze that accompanies the nod. If they're looking *away from you*, it usually means that they are ready to start speaking. If they're looking *at you*, they're just conveying their agreement with what's been said.

If you've watched experienced chat show hosts on television, you'll notice that there's a lot of nodding activity as an encouragement for the guests to 'open up'.

What's the message from the 'head nod'?

Generally, the speed of the head nod indicates what the listener is conveying. Many people are confused about this – and have never bothered to delve into the meanings. Let's get this straight now, because it will really help in your future interactions and avoid confusion – and also *annoyance* on the speaker's part when you don't get the message!

- **Slow head nod** – is usually an *encouragement* nod to get the speaker to carry on talking. (They're also indicating to you – the speaker – that they don't want to switch roles yet.)
- **Slightly faster** – they're telling you that they *understand*.
- **Very rapid** – either that they totally *agree* (arousing emotions in them) or possibly that they want to interrupt and become the speaker.

You, as the speaker, need to check for other bodily clues as to which of these is the one that the listener is trying to convey.



Jonathan Ross encourages Sir Bruce Forsyth to open up



If you don't currently use these head movements it would be worth trying them out in your future interactions. See what difference it makes. You'll find that conversations will last longer, be more open and that the 'turn taking' will be much more natural.

While we're on the subject of head movements during listening and how people show that they're interested in what you're saying, you've come across what's known as the '**head tilt**' during conversations (we discussed them briefly in Lesson 2). If we go back to Darwin, for a moment, his interpretation among humans and animals was that it was a 'non-threatening' head movement, which indicated interest in something.

If we roll the years forward, studies show that, of course, he was right – we tend to do this subconsciously when we're listening attentively because something has caught our interest. You'll see it in audiences in cinemas, theatres, in meeting rooms at work, during training sessions and, of course, in conversations with all and sundry. **Like the head nod, it is a submissive gesture.** It's thought that for some of us it recreates the feeling we had as a baby when resting our head against our parent's body, when looking for comfort or rest. Think for a moment of someone you know who uses this head tilt. What feelings does it evoke in you? Do you use it yourself sometimes? Consciously or subconsciously? I'm sure the answers are very revealing.

“It is also a submissive gesture”

Mirroring or synchronising (to build rapport)

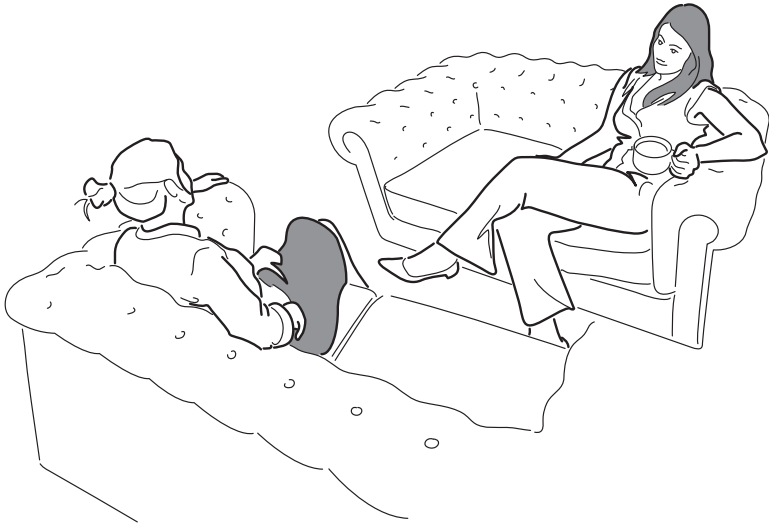
You've probably come across the term 'mirroring' when it's used in the context of interpersonal activity. It does cause confusion. Think of it, for now, as being in synchronicity with another person – when you're getting on well. **Being 'on the same wavelength'**. You don't mirror the other person's body language exactly. You make yours similar to theirs and you try to adopt their general posture, in a completely natural way.

After a while, your body language instinctively becomes similar to the person you're with, as do the 'vocal' aspects like rate of speaking and loudness of voice. You don't try to match another's paralinguistic style exactly. The head nodding becomes 'in sync' and other postural movements and hand gestures all seem natural and follow a similar rhythm. You lean forward to show you're listening. Eventually they do the same. There's a rapport through body language.

'My kimono is open'

We instinctively tend to do the opposite – in other words, display negative body language – when we're experiencing discomfort or don't agree with what somebody is saying, or when perhaps in a work/business interaction we're listening to somebody who speaks in jargon or corporate buzzwords with irritating clichés – 'My kimono is open', for example, meaning I've disclosed everything (I'll just give you a little time to recover from that!) We've been through much of the 'pushing the envelope' and 'blue-sky thinking' phase, but new monsters keep regenerating from MBA schools and the like. But if these words stop people listening then it hasn't enhanced communication – it has impeded it.

Either way it stops people listening, and so it's the reading of 'listening' body language that alerts the speaker that it's time to change tack, and also maybe explain what something means, before completely losing the audience. We may sit further back in our seats, for example – as opposed to leaning forward. This can cause a similar reaction in the other person. So you have matching or 'mirroring' – **but of negative body language**.



If you see this happening, be aware of your own emotions and **get back to an 'open' posture**. If you try to resist closing up and continue to adopt an open style then there's more chance of a favourable outcome and less chance of them staying in a 'closed' body language position. **Non-verbal language is quite contagious – for better or worse**. If they're stuck in that mode, hand them something to look at to unlock their arms.

Vocal aspects of body language

'It ain't what you say' – it's the paralanguage. The vocal part of body language relates to the 38 per cent that we spoke about earlier. We can vary tone in a number of different ways:

- The *pitch* of the voice can be varied – we can go from high to low and move between these two levels during a conversation.
- The *speed* of speaking can be varied – we can speak rapidly or at a slower pace.
- The *loudness* of the voice can be varied – going from soft to extremely loud.
- The *rhythm* of the voice can also be varied.

The term for this non-verbal aspect of speech is **paralanguage**. The *para* comes from the Greek denoting ‘alongside’ or ‘above and beyond’.

Let’s talk about *pitch* first because it’s capable of expressing a wide range of different meanings. So its importance as a part of non-verbal body language is huge. For example, it’s easy to see how the pitch can indicate a contrast between making a statement and asking a question – ‘They’re coming back already’ as opposed to ‘They’re coming back already?’ We could add a third – ‘*They’re* coming back already?’ We can signify a bored state by using a monotone, or we can express surprise by increasing the pitch.

“‘We can express surprise by increasing the pitch’”

The *speed* or tempo, as it’s sometimes called, can indicate different meanings. We know that something expressed at rapid speed indicates urgency of some kind, while slower or more deliberate speech conveys an altogether different meaning. It can be indicative of a person’s state – nervousness or insecurity, for example. There are of course differences in personality types resulting in some people adopting a more impatient style of speaking, which is quite rapid in its delivery. Equally, at the opposite end of the spectrum there are perhaps the more ‘introverted’ types who may be more guarded in their delivery.

Loudness is another aspect that conveys different meaning. Generally, we regard a very loud voice as conveying anger. This brings to mind the booming voice of an actor I once saw in a play – playing an actor – and his constant refrain to his wife, in that booming voice was – ‘I warn you. I’m in a mood.’

These three aspects of speech together provide a *rhythm* to the voice. **People with attractive voices have a package that proves pleasing to others** (more about that later).

So it’s plain to see that unless we’ve had the benefit of being trained in voice production, as actors inevitably have been, we don’t tend to give that much thought to how we sound – and how others are perceiving us. If you’re losing out in the working

world on job interviews, promotions, effectiveness in meetings or selling a product – or just about anything – then could it be that there’s something you’re not being told? Maybe you don’t sound right.

Along with breathing, all the elements that we’ve discussed contribute to clarity and good diction. If you never pause for *breath*, for example, it can irritate and grate on the nerves of the listener.

- If you *breathe deeply* from the abdomen, it gives you a more *relaxed and confident* sound.
- If you *shallow breathe*, with shorter breaths, it’s because you’re *nervous or anxious*.

BODY WISE



A simple maxim: *how you breathe is how you sound.*

Remember that good posture is essential for good speech. **Hunching your shoulders, or just generally slumping, is not good for your delivery; neither is tension in your throat or stomach.** Before that telephone call, or before you walk into an interview room, breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose – make sure you hold for a few seconds as you inhale – then release the breath gently through your mouth.

Voice is obviously important to us in our liking and disliking of people. Think about radio presenters, specifically those DJs that provide chat and play songs as part of their radio show. They’re unable to provide us with any visual body language. We determine our liking, in the first instance, from the voice. Was BBC’s long-running Terry Wogan show so popular simply because of the songs he played? Then there’s the legendary Tony Blackburn recently back on BBC radio (and reunited with award-winning radio presenter Phil Swern). Few decades on and still pleasing listeners. Or John Humphry’s on Radio 4’s *Today*? Is it just the music or the news? No, we subliminally know which voices are pleasing to us.

BODY WISE



If we don't like the messenger, we won't like the message.

So, if you think you're doing everything else right and you can't understand where you might be going wrong, check the non-verbal element of your voice.

Formula for a perfect voice

Research from the linguistics department of Sheffield University in May 2008 – in a paper entitled *Formula for a perfect voice* – produced some interesting findings. The researchers were trying to create a new formula for the perfect female and male voices. The formula represented the subtle blend of **tone, speed, delivery, words per minute** and **intonation**. Analysing the highest scoring voices, sound engineers and academics hatched a mathematical equation for elements that the ideal voice should contain.

Researchers found that the ideal voice should utter no more than 164 words per minute (wpm) and pause for 0.48 seconds between sentences that fall in intonation. The result was that a *combination* of Dame Judi Dench, Mariella Frostrup and Honor Blackman make up the perfect female voice. Dame Judi speaks at 160 wpm breaking off for 0.5 secs between sentences; Mariella Frostrup speaks for an average of 180 wpm and pauses for 0.5 secs; Honor Blackman articulates herself at a more considered 120 wpm.

How did the men fare in the findings? The most appealing voices were a *combination* of Alan Rickman, Jeremy Irons and Michael Gambon. Jeremy Irons talks at 200 wpm; Alan Rickman at 180 wpm; and Michael Gambon at 160 wpm.

Researchers also concluded that the vocal traits associated with positive characteristics such as trust and confidence scored higher – and so these produced the perfect voice.

As was said earlier – it's not just what you say ... *it's the paralanguage*.

BODYtalk



Q I'm not a bad listener, I don't think, and after what you've just been telling us I think the problem must be that I don't *show* that I'm listening. People don't tend to share information with me and I'm not having much success at work either. Surely, if I sit there and maintain eye contact, that shows I'm listening?

Not really – a stuffed dummy with well-manufactured eyeballs (and clear irises) could probably match you by the sound of it. It's not enough just to 'receive'. The 'transmitter' wants to know that you understand what they say, that you're actually 'still in the room' (not 'running your own tapes' in your head) and whether they have agreement or interest. Is that too much to ask? Wouldn't you expect the same in the opposite situation?

Q Yes, I suppose. How do I look enthusiastic then?

As we said earlier, you have to show you're listening with your whole body. A good listener is worth their weight in gold. People perceive those who listen to them in a very positive light. Try nodding because it encourages people to carry on talking, and the slight head tilt (common with women) shows you're paying attention. Lean forward in your chair to show open body language – this often encourages the other person to do the same. Obviously facial expressions, showing empathy at the right moments, confirm that you are paying attention. Right? Now see how your interactions with people change.

Q The matching of body language during an interaction . . . I think you also called it mirroring. How does that work? I know what you said, but isn't it a bit false?

Only if you misunderstand the purpose of it and forget its naturalness. Studies have analysed people in a state

of rapport (you can use your own terminology for this if you like, call it ‘getting on well’ or ‘on the same wavelength’, it doesn’t really matter). What matters is that when movements and speech eventually – and naturally – get to a stage when two people are almost mirroring vocal and non-verbal aspects, there’s a good state of rapport. When you have that, the relationship flows – there’s a synchrony or rhythm with the other person’s actions and gestures.

For example, you’ll pick up on the speed at which a person normally speaks, the way that they gesture and their seating posture. When the subconscious picks up that nothing ‘jars’ then movements and conversation flow. So if your tendency is to speak loud and fast, for example, and the other person speaks more slowly and softer, you adopt that style in a natural way.

Q I was really interested in that section on ‘paralanguage’. I’m not that great with words and articulation. If I sharpen up on my – what I think you psychologists call – ‘impression management’ skills in presenting myself and spend more time on that, I should be okay. That’s given me hope. Am I interpreting that right?

Err . . . (excuse the speech disfluency) no. ID 10T error. You have to understand one thing. If you don’t get the visual body language right a person is not going to ‘stick around’ even to hear your words. If you get the visual right – okay, well done for that – but then when you open your mouth you’re an absolute turn-off, you’re finished. So it’s not a substitute that we’re after. We’re looking for congruence – words and visual matching up to create the right impression.

Q I agree with what you’ve been saying. I know that sometimes when we interview women for PA jobs they’re perfectly dressed, their greetings body language is good and they seem controlled when they first sit down – and then when they open their mouth it’s downhill all the way.

Exactly. I'll just read out the conversation that the head of personnel for a city bank – who was looking for someone for a front desk position – had with her boss:

'One girl we spoke to had one of the most dreadful voices I've ever come across. She didn't vary the tone the whole conversation and so came across as someone lacking in energy or being very bored. When working on front line reception, as she would have been, that's not the impression we want clients to receive on walking in.'

Coffee break . . .



Your relationships in life are determined by your skills in listening.



Active listening involves ‘listening with the whole body’; you need to show you’re listening.



Time and time again, studies show that the most charismatic and successful – and popular – people are good listeners – and are seen to be listening – and this conveys empathy and promotes rapport.



Many people confuse listening and hearing because it’s possible to hear something without actually listening to it. The first is a physiological process and the second is a psychological process.



Good ‘listening body language’ is:

- making good eye contact
- head movements
- mirroring – in a natural way.



Many people fail to achieve rapport because of the lack of any head nods and it can convey (sometimes mistakenly) that you’re either not interested in what’s being said or not paying attention.



Listening beyond the words spoken constitutes the 38 per cent of meaning (remember 55, 38, 7) that we derive from any communication.

BODY LANGUAGE



The vocal aspect of body language is known as ‘paralanguage’ and refers to the pitch, speed, loudness and rhythm of the voice.



If you breathe deeply from the abdomen you achieve a more relaxed and confident sound. If you shallow breathe – with short breaths – it’s (whether you know it or not) because you’re nervous or anxious.



Recent studies have shown that vocal traits associated with positive characteristics such as trust and confidence score highly.

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