

Non-Verbal Communication

Calumet Toastmasters, Club# 3313, District# 11
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BEGINNING

Just watch me:

"You are crazy!" (*Smile and put a pleasant face*)

"You are crazy!" (*Nod your head up and down and put some serious face*)

What is the difference?

I have the **same** verbal message in both cases but my non-verbal communication through my facial expression is **not**. Can you see the totally different emotion and feeling that the audience can see in me?

That's the significance of non-verbal communication.

BODY

There are two types of communication that happen when you are giving a speech -

Verbal (Vocal) - Conveyed through the voice

Non-Verbal - Conveyed through the body

It is very hard to notice the fact that more than half of our communication happens non-verbally during a speech. You can't stop sending non-verbal messages during a speech, BUT you can manage and control them. If your actions are wedded to your words you will strengthen the importance of your speech, but if they don't, you will confuse the audience and eventually you lose their attention.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was a great poet, philosopher and essayist, once said in a meeting "What you are speaking so loudly that I can not hear what you say". So, when you speak, people not only judge your speech, but they also judge you. If you can not convince them with your body movements that that you are interested, sincere and involved in your speech, they are also unlikely to accept your spoken message.

Fear & Nervousness

Before I move on to the details, let me share something about Fear & Nervousness. Being nervous prior to the speech is to a certain extent is healthy since it shows you care about doing well. Even the world's top entertainers admit this fact. Fear & Nervousness in public speaking work on 3 levels - Mental, Emotional and physical. A speaker's mental and emotional fears are conquered by self confidence which is a by product of preparation and experience. The more you prepare your speech and the more you are experienced, the better chances that you will get rid of mental and emotional fears. The physical manifestations can be best controlled through continuous use of gestures and body movements.

There are 5 ways in which you transmit non-verbal messages to your audience:

1. Speaking Posture 2. Gestures 3. Body Movements 4. Facial Expressions 5. Eye Contact

These are the 5 ways in which you constantly send some information to the audience.

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1. SPEAKING POSTURE

How you position yourself when you speak communicates its own set of visual messages to an audience. More than anything, it reflects your attitude, telling your listeners whether you're confident, alert and in command of yourself. The other benefit of a good posture is it helps you to breathe properly and project your voice effectively.

Here are some guidelines for a good speaking posture:

- a. Stand straight with your feet 6 to 12 inches apart and one slightly ahead of the other
- b. Lean forward a little
- c. Knees should be straight but not locked
- d. Relax your shoulders
- e. Keep your chest up and stomach in
- f. Let your hands hang naturally.

It takes some time to watch yourself and practice these things, but you have to keep an eye on how you are doing with your posture in each of your speeches.

2. GESTURES

Gesture is a specific body movement that reinforces a verbal message or conveys a particular thought or emotion. Though gestures can be made by head, shoulders or even with legs and feet, most are made with hands and arms.

Your hands can be marvelous tools of communication when you speak. But many inexperienced speakers are unsure of what to do with their hands. Some try to get them out of the way by putting them in pockets or behind their backs. Some actually over-gesture out of nervousness by waving their arms and hands wildly which distracts the audience.

If used effectively gestures can:

- a. Clarify & Support your message
- b. Function as visual aids

Example 1: When a sales manager presents the dramatic increase in gross sales of the company, he can say "in 2006 the sales revenue was \$3M and in 2008 it reached \$6M" (*use proper gestures here with hands*)

When the speaker uses his hands like this, the audience can easily imagine a virtual graph that depicts the increase in sales from 2006 to 2008.

Example 2: Why a person living in Chicago, USA wants to help a poor student from a village in INDIA, what exactly connects them both? (*Again, use your hands to show the bridge*)

In this example, the audience can easily visualize that there is a virtual bridge between the two persons through which the help goes from one side to the other.

That's the beauty and power of gestures.

One important caution about using gestures in your speech is, sometime you may have to adapt your gestures to fit the size and nature of your audience. Generally speaking, the larger the audience, the broader and slower your gestures should be. Also, the young audiences are usually attracted to vigorous gestures but the older and more conservative groups may feel irritated and threatened by a speaker whose physical actions are too powerful.

3. BODY MOVEMENT

Body movement is changing your position or location during a speech. It can be a tremendous asset or a tremendous liability to your speech. It is the most effective means of burning up nervous energy and relieving physical tension. While changing your position

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during a speech, always lead with the foot nearest to your destination. Never cross one foot over the other when you begin a movement.

4. FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

When you speak, more clearly than any other part your face communicates your feelings and emotions. Just watch me:

"You are crazy!" (*Smile and put a pleasant face*)

"You are crazy!" (*Nod your head up and down and put some serious face*)

See the totally different emotion and feeling that the audience can see in me with the same verbal message in but a different non-verbal communication in both cases.

5. EYE CONTACT

After your voice, your eyes are most powerful tool for communicating. Through good eye contact, the audience can feel important, senses a personal connection with the speaker and thus feel that the speaker is communicating directly with him/her.

The very uniqueness about a good eye contact is, not only your eyes send vital messages while you're speaking, they also receive them. Effective eye contact is a **feedback device** that makes the speaking situation a two-way communication process. Only by looking at the listeners can you determine how they are reacting:

- a. Are you doing well with your speech?
- b. Does the audience understand what you're saying?
- c. Are you holding their attention?
- d. Is your message being accepted?

By watching the audience's reactions, you can make immediate adjustments to your presentation. **For Ex.** If you see that in the status meeting, your manager's face has become so red since he is very upset with the progress of the project that you are heading, you definitely don't want to show him the next slide that reads 'I want to take 2 weeks vacation next month'. If you do so, your boss may stand up and say "Take a permanent vacation because you are fired!"

So, you might have to do last minute changes to your presentations with the feedback from your eye contact. Experienced speakers consider this visual feedback to be the biggest benefit of eye contact. Once you have developed the ability to gauge audience's reaction and tailor your words accordingly, you will surely become much more effective speaker.

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is, we need to realize the fact that more than 50% of our communication happens non-verbally. You have to make sure your body doesn't speak louder than your voice. The words from your voice AND the actions from your body should be consistent and they should support each other to make you a good speaker.

THANK YOU
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