

## Ch 5 - Nonverbal Communication

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### **5.0 Introduction**

*Communication Is More Than Verbal.* Good negotiators must first be good communicators. Unfortunately, many negotiators think of communication only as oral or written verbal exchanges. But verbal exchanges account for only a fraction of the messages people send and receive. Research has shown that between 70 and 90 percent of the entire communication spectrum is nonverbal. Consequently, you should be aware of the different forms of nonverbal communication that you are likely to encounter during negotiation conferences.

Although we continually send and receive nonverbal messages, most of us are not fully aware of the ways that we communicate nonverbally. Still, if you watch carefully, you will see that most leading professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, politicians, corporate chief executive officers, and contract negotiators) are excellent nonverbal communicators. Some people call it charisma. Others call it style. Whatever it is, they have it!

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### **5.1 Recognizing Different Forms Of Nonverbal Communication**

*Importance of Nonverbal Communication.* If you are only aware of a negotiator's verbal message, you will likely miss the major portion of the overall communication. Being aware of both nonverbal and verbal messages will give you an important edge.

- Skills in interpreting nonverbal communications will help you glean useful information from others involved in the negotiation.
- An awareness of nonverbal communication may also prevent you from harming your own negotiation position by inadvertently sending nonverbal signals that disclose confidential information or weaknesses in your position.

*Areas of Nonverbal Communication.* Nonverbal communications include all forms of communication that are not part of the language that we speak or write. There are many ways that we reveal ourselves nonverbally. This text will concentrate on the three areas of nonverbal communication that will most likely affect contract negotiations:

- Body language (kinesic communication) using facial expressions, body movements, gestures, and posture;
- Physical environment (proxemic communication) using available space, distance from or proximity to other people, and territorial control; and
- Personal attributes such as:
  - Physical appearance (artifactual communication) including all options that communicators use to modify their appearance;
  - Vocal cues (auditory communication); and
  - Touch (tactile communication) particularly the handshake.

*Conscious or Subliminal Messages.* Nonverbal communications can involve conscious or subliminal messages.

- **Conscious nonverbal communications.**
  - Senders of conscious nonverbal communications are aware that they are sending a message and the general meaning of that message. For example, the individuals extending a hug know that they are embracing someone and that action is normally perceived as indicating affection.
  - Receivers of conscious nonverbal communication are aware that they received the message and the meaning intended by the sender. The receiver of a hug, for example, generally realizes that the message is a sign of friendship.
- **Subliminal nonverbal communications.** Subliminal messages are communicated to the subconscious mind of the receiver. Receivers of subliminal messages are not

consciously aware of the message. However, these messages are important.

- Gut reactions are frequently based upon your subconscious reading of subliminal nonverbal communications.
- Police and military uniforms subliminally communicate the authority of those wearing them.
- Well-dressed executives project success and credibility.
- Poor dress transmits messages of failure and a lack of credibility.
- Although subliminal messages do not create awareness on a conscious level, they still influence the receiver. In fact, subliminal messages are often more powerful than conscious messages. The advertising world is replete with examples of the value of subliminal nonverbal messages.
- Young, beautiful people are often seen in advertisements to communicate the subconscious message that the advertised product is associated with youth and beauty.
- Companies pay large sums of money to have their products appear in movies. While these appearances are not typical product advertisements, the mere association of the product with the movie transmits subliminal messages that will influence viewers.

*Voluntary or Involuntary Messages.* Conscious and subliminal messages can both be transmitted voluntarily or involuntarily.

- **Involuntary nonverbal communications.** Most nonverbal messages are involuntarily. In fact, many negotiators are not aware that they communicate nonverbally.
  - Body language is one area where the involuntary nature of nonverbal communication is particularly evident. Every day, people unintentionally convey nonverbal signals by their facial expressions, gestures, and body postures. For example, people telling falsehoods often involuntarily send a telltale nonverbal message to listeners by frequently blinking their eyes.
  - Because involuntary nonverbal communications represent unplanned physical responses, this communication form tends to be particularly

revealing and more honest than verbal communication or even conscious nonverbal communication.

- **Voluntary nonverbal communications.** Nonverbal communication can also be controlled by a knowledgeable person.
  - A person who knows that people telling falsehoods often blink their eyes can take special care not to blink when telling a falsehood.
  - A person who knows that a hug indicates friendship can consciously hug his/her worst enemy as a trick to put the person off guard or as part of an effort to improve their relationship.

*Interpreting Nonverbal Messages.* You must interpret nonverbal messages as part of the overall communication system.

- Typically, an individual nonverbal message is difficult to accurately interpret in isolation because most messages have several possible meanings. For example:
  - A yawn might indicate a lack of interest, physical fatigue, or both.
  - Rapid eye blinking might indicate deceit or just poor fitting contact lenses.
- A nonverbal message is easiest to interpret when it is consistent with other communications that you are receiving at the same time. For example, you might be more likely to interpret rapid eye blinking as indicative of dishonesty if the person also avoids eye contact while speaking.
- An inconsistent nonverbal message may be impossible to interpret. However, an apparently negative nonverbal message should raise a red flag indicating that you should look more carefully for related verbal or nonverbal clues. Look for messages that correlate with each other so that you can make a more accurate interpretation.

*Cultural Differences.* Always consider cultural differences when you send or receive nonverbal messages. A message that has a particular meaning in one society can have a completely different meaning in another society. For example, in the United States we encourage eye contact as an indicator of honesty and interest. People in some other societies believe that they should look down when talking

to another person to indicate deference and respect. For them, direct eye contact might be considered offensive and disrespectful.

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## **5.2 Describing How Body Language Affects Negotiations**

*Body Language and Attitudes.* Body language research has catalogued 135 distinct gestures and expressions of the face, head, and body. Eighty of these expressions were face and head gestures, including nine different ways of smiling.

These gestures and expressions provide insight into the attitude of the originator. Simultaneous physical signals often reinforce each other and reduce the ambiguity surrounding the message. For example, eagerness is often exhibited with the simultaneous physical displays of excessive smiling along with frequent nodding of the head.

Common attitudes communicated nonverbally during negotiations can be grouped into two broad classifications -- positive attitudes and negative attitudes.

*Example of Positive and Negative Attitudes.*



### **Which team shows a win/win attitude?**

The illustration above depicts the body language demonstrated by two negotiation teams. The nonverbal messages provided by their body postures, facial gestures, and appearance provide substantial information about both teams. Note that the team on the:

- Right transmits nonverbal messages exuding confidence and success.
- Left transmits nonverbal messages that convey negative attitudes and other unflattering characteristics.

*Positive Attitudes.* Positive attitudes indicated by body language may signal a sincere effort to achieve win/win results. Key indicators of positive attitudes are listed below.

- Speakers indicate respect and honesty by keeping their eyes focused on the eyes of the listener(s).
- Confidence is often exhibited by:
  - Hands in pockets with thumbs out;
  - Hands on lapel of coat;
  - Steepled fingers or hands;
  - Good body posture (e.g., square shoulders and a straight back); or
  - Hands on hips.
- Interest may be exhibited by one or more of the following:
  - Tilted head toward speaker;
  - Sitting on edge of chair;
  - Upper body leaning in sprinter's position; or
  - Eyes focused on speaker.
- Careful evaluation of what is being said is frequently indicated by one or more of the following:
  - Peering out over eyeglasses;
  - Chin cupped between thumb and fingers;
  - Putting hands to bridge of nose; or
  - Stroking chin.
- Eagerness is often demonstrated by:
  - Rubbing hands together;
  - Smiling excessively; or
  - Frequent nodding of the head.

*Negative Attitudes.* Negative attitudes indicated by body language may signal a deceitful nature or a win/lose

approach to negotiation. Common indicators of negative attitudes are listed below.

- Deception or dishonesty is often demonstrated by:
  - Frequent eye blinking;
  - Hand covering mouth while speaking;
  - Frequent coughing;
  - Looking away while speaking; or
  - Quick sideways glances.
- Defensiveness may be indicated by the following:
  - Arms crossed high on chest;
  - Crossed legs; or
  - Pointing an index finger at another person.
- Insecurity is often exhibited by:
  - Hands completely in pocket;
  - Constant fidgeting;
  - Chewing on a pencil;
  - Frequent coughing;
  - Biting fingernails; or
  - Hand wringing.
- Frustration is frequently shown by:
  - Tightness of a persons jaw;
  - Rubbing back of neck; or
  - Drawing eyebrows together.
- Listener boredom or indifference is generally indicated by:
  - Eyes not focused at speaker or looking elsewhere;
  - Head in hand;
  - Sloppy or informal body posture; or
  - Preoccupation with something else.

*Gestures.* Be particularly careful when interpreting or using gestures. A gesture that means one thing in one society can mean something completely different in another. There is a good chance that you will encounter differing interpretations whenever you are negotiating with someone from another part of the world. Even if the other party is from the United States, some of these differing interpretations may remain as part of the person's heritage.

- Shaking your head up-and-down means "yes" in the United States and left-to-right means "no." In some parts of the world the meanings are just the opposite.
- The hand signal for O.K. in the United States is an obscene gesture in some societies.

- The thumbs-up gesture is a positive sign in most of the world, but in some cultures it is considered a rude gesture.
- The V-shaped hand gesture with the index finger and middle finger may mean victory or peace in the United States, but in some countries it could be interpreted as an obscene gesture.

*Body Language Application.* In contract negotiation, you can use a knowledge of body language in several ways:

- As you prepare for the negotiation conference, you should briefly review key elements of body language with members of the Government team.
  - Exhibiting positive attitudes will make them more believable as they present support for the Government position.
  - Exhibiting negative attitudes will bring their support into question and may raise questions about the entire Government position.
  - A questioning look by a team member as you make a statement may bring your credibility into question.
  - A lack of interest exhibited by a team member may convince the contractor's negotiator that the issue being addressed is not important to the Government.
- During the negotiation conference, you can use your knowledge of body language in several ways. You can:
  - Gain greater insight into the attitude of the contractor's negotiator.
  - Do not take one element of body language and make grand assumptions. Remember that:
    - Similar types of body language can have substantially different meanings.
    - Body language can be controlled by a knowledgeable negotiator.
  - Look for confirming communications either verbal or nonverbal.
  - Concentrate on using body language that supports your verbal communications (e.g., eye contact will support your truthfulness).
  - Unless you are very good, you will not be able to completely suppress your natural body language.
  - However, unless your natural body language indicates a negative attitude, your use of



positive body language should strongly support your position.

- Consider body language as you listen to the positions taken by other Government team members.
- If they appear uncertain, you might interject support.
- If they appear negative, you might ask for a brief caucus to remind them of the importance of positive body language.

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### **5.3 Describing How The Physical Environment Affects Negotiations**

*Physical Environment.* The physical environment transmits nonverbal messages that can be extremely important to negotiators. Key elements of the environment include:

- The negotiation conference facility;
- Conference table configuration, size, and seating arrangements;
- Physical distance between negotiators;
- Relative elevation of the negotiators; and
- Visual aids.

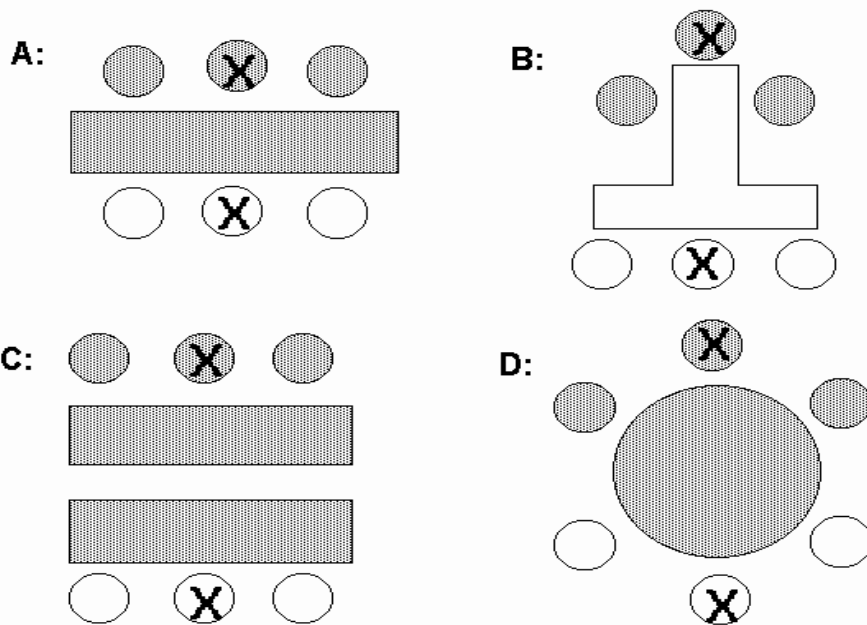
*Negotiation Conference Facility.* Your negotiation conference facility says volumes about you, your organization, and the importance of the negotiation.

- Messages are sent by the entire facility not just the conference room. A dirty or substandard rest room might actually send a stronger message about your organization than a substandard conference room.
- Negotiators will react to subliminal messages related to the negotiation facility even though they may not realize that the messages exist.
  - Superior negotiation facilities convey positive messages about the host and the importance of the negotiation. These messages may increase the self-assurance of the host and lower the confidence of the guest negotiators.
  - Substandard negotiation facilities convey unflattering nonverbal messages. These unflattering messages may lower the confidence of the host team while increasing the self-assurance of the guest negotiators.

- Negotiators' reactions may be affected by plush carpet or expensive furniture but they are affected more by physical comfort.
  - An older or less attractive Government facility may provide positive results as long as it offers sufficient comfort for everyone involved. That includes:
    - Adequate furnishings, lighting, and space for everyone involved; and
    - A comfortable room temperature.
    - Physical discomfort will likely negatively affect the attitudes of people already under pressure. It may particularly affect the attitude of the guest team, if they perceive the discomfort as a win/lose tactic by the host.

*Negotiation Table Configuration.* Although there is no standard table configuration for every negotiation conference, the table arrangement transmits important conscious and subliminal messages. Those messages are so important that the negotiations to end the Vietnam War were delayed for almost a year while the parties involved negotiated the shape of the negotiation table.

- The best table arrangement for any negotiation depends on the situation. However, win/win negotiation attitudes can be promoted with table configurations that convey trust. In contrast, win/lose attitudes are created by table settings that communicate disparity or mistrust between the two parties.
- Each negotiation table configuration below conveys a different message.



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- o Arrangement A is a typical configuration for contract negotiations. The two parties sit together to indicate and foster unity. Each team is on a different side of the table and the teams are facing each other so each team member can clearly hear what anyone on the other team has to say.
  - o Arrangement B may tend to give one party an advantage over the other because the arrangement suggests only one important person, the person at the end of the vertical extension.
  - o Arrangement C shows a need for space between the two parties. That space could mean more formality or less trust.
  - o Arrangement D may be the most conducive to win/win negotiations because the round shape is usually associated with equality.

*Negotiation Table Size.* The conference table(s) should be large enough to comfortably seat participants from both teams with adequate space for their work papers, reference material, and briefcases. Depending upon the complexity of and probable length of the negotiation, more chairs may be needed if specialists or observers are added to the group. However, any additional furniture should be positioned so as not to interfere with the action at the negotiation table.

*Principal Negotiator's Position at the Negotiation Table.*

The physical position of the principal negotiator is generally at the center of the negotiation team. The ideal place for the principal negotiator in each arrangement shown above is the middle seat flanked by team members.

- The central position conveys a message of authority and sends an image of a unified negotiation team. For example, the President of the United States always sits at the center of the conference table during Cabinet meetings.
- Besides sending a negative nonverbal message, positioning the principal negotiator somewhere other than at the center of the team also has other consequences. In particular, an end position will likely make it more difficult for some team members to whisper advice, give cues, or pass notes to the principal negotiator.

*Physical Distance Between Negotiators.* People in different cultures require different amounts of physical distance for communication. Too little or too much space between people can have a negative effect. In the United States, most people:

- Reserve the space closer than 1.5 feet for intimate communication. A negotiator may be annoyed and nervous if you attempt to conduct any significant communication from any distance closer than 1.5 feet.
- Allow a distance of 1.5 to 4.0 feet for close interpersonal contact. A negotiator will likely become increasingly annoyed and nervous as you move closer.
- Allow a distance of 4.0 to 12.0 feet for most business transactions or consultations. Note that four feet is about the distance across the typical conference table.
- Communicate only briefly or formally at a distance beyond 12.0 feet.

*Relative Elevation of the Negotiators.* The phrase "I look up to ..." indicates respect. You need to be aware that this phrase is more than just a cliché.

In fact, most people in the United States are conditioned early in life to defer to people on a higher physical level and that training continues throughout their lives. Teachers stand while students sit. Judges preside

from raised platforms. Political leaders address supporters from raised stages.

Some negotiators attempt to take advantage of this conditioning by raising themselves above the other negotiator. Some make key points while standing or walking around as the other negotiator sits. Others have gone so far as to raise the chairs for their team to a level higher than those for the other team.

Do not allow another negotiator to intimidate you by physically talking down to you. If necessary, stand yourself or ask the other negotiator to sit down.

*Visual Aids.* Assure that adequate visual aids are available to support both negotiating teams. Marker boards and chalkboards are practically a standard requirement. Visual aids may also include overhead projectors or videocassette recorders with televisions.

Marker boards and chalkboards are excellent for summarizing the negotiation agenda, issues, and agreements. However, you need to remember that the person who is writing on the board has the power of the marker. By controlling what is written, that person can modify the agenda, define key issues, or draft agreements. That power can substantially affect negotiation progress and results.

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#### **5.4 Recognizing How Personal Attributes Affect Negotiations**

*Personal Physical Appearance.* You need be aware of the effect that your physical appearance may have on nonverbal communication. Awareness may permit you to build on your natural advantages. However, awareness of any natural disadvantage may be even more important.

Research has found that:

- Physical attractiveness affects the way you perceive yourself and the way other perceive you. Attractive people:
  - Are better liked, get better jobs, and have more self-esteem and social power than unattractive people.

- Receive preferential treatment in the initiation and development of interpersonal relationships.
- Height affects perceptions:
  - Taller men and women are normally perceived as more dominant than shorter men and women.
  - Tall females are perceived as even more dominant and smarter when they are with short males.
- Body type affects perceptions
  - Athletic looking people are normally perceived as more assertive and self-reliant than people with other body types.
  - Heavier less athletic looking people are normally perceived as more lazy, sympathetic, and dependent than people with other body types.
  - Skinny fragile looking people are normally perceived as more suspicious, nervous, and pessimistic than people with other body types.

*Personal Dress.* The importance of how we dress is highlighted by the cliché, "Dress for success." Clothing has been found to affect perceptions of credibility, likability, attractiveness, and dominance, but researchers agree that clothing has the most potent affect on credibility.

Unfortunately, many otherwise good negotiators ignore the importance of personal dress during negotiations, and that ignorance negatively affects their ability to attain mutually satisfactory negotiation results.

- Make sure that your clothing is appropriate for the negotiation situation.
  - Normally, you should dress for negotiations as you would for a promotion or job interview. This type of dress emphasizes your credibility and professionalism.
  - Casual days are growing in popularity. On such days, more casual dress may be appropriate. If you adopt more casual dress, always:
    - Advise the contractor of your intent to adopt a more casual atmosphere.
    - Remember that more casual dress will reduce the nonverbal emphasis on your credibility and professionalism.
    - Clothing such as jeans is never appropriate unless you are negotiating on a construction site or similar area.

- If you wear a uniform, wear it properly.
  - In general, people in uniform are perceived to have more power than the same people out of uniform.
  - Failing to wear a uniform properly may be perceived as showing disrespect for yourself, your organization, and the other negotiator.

*General Personal Grooming.* General grooming, especially poor grooming, can have a profound affect on how you are perceived by others. Do not allow poor personal grooming (e.g., uncombed hair or an unshaven look) to detract from your appearance and communicate unfavorable nonverbal messages about you or your negotiation position. Remember, that if you look good, you will generally:

- Feel better;
- Perform better; and
- Be perceived better by others.

*Vocal Cues.* The nonverbal messages communicated by the sound of the human voice, can provide valuable information during negotiations. There are eight attributes of speech that provide especially important vocal cues that you should consider during negotiation:

- **Loudness.** Without enough loudness you cannot be heard. However shouting or a harsh sounding voice may be perceived as disruptive or insulting. Many times, lowering your voice almost to a whisper will help you make a point better than shouting.
- **Pitch.** Most factual communication includes moderate changes in the pitch of your voice. A monotone involves little or no change and may be perceived as indicating apathy or boredom. A high pitched voice may be perceived as indicating excitement. A low pitched voice may be perceived as indicating anger.
- **Rate.** A slow rate of speech may frustrate the listener. An increasing rate may be perceived as the result of increasing intensity. A fast rate may be perceived as an indicator of nervousness and it may also be difficult to understand.
- **Quality.** This is the characteristic that permits you to differentiate one voice from another.
- **Regularity.** The regular or rhythmic voice pattern will normally make you sound more confident or authoritative. Irregular speech might be perceived as

- more thoughtful or uncertain depending on your words and other nonverbal messages.
- **Articulation.** Speaking each word clearly makes you easier to understand.
  - **Pronunciation.** To be understood, you must also use the correct sounds and emphasis in pronouncing each word. Mispronouncing a word might be perceived as indicator of ignorance or incompetence.
  - **Silence.** The absence of sound can also send a strong message. Silence gives you an opportunity to listen. You can obtain useful information from the contractor's team by listening to what they say and how they say it.

*Handshake Cues.* Most negotiations begin and end with a handshake and every time the physical clasping of hands provides subliminal nonverbal message(s) to the parties involved. These messages can have a significant effect on their perceptions or each other.

- Use your initial handshake to convey a positive first impression.
  - Signal positive attributes through your grip.
  - A firm handshake or executive grip conveys positive attributes (e.g., power, confidence, and sincerity).
  - A loose handshake may send unflattering messages (e.g., weakness and insecurity). Some people even feel insulted when someone uses a loose grip or just grasps their fingertips.
  - A vice-like grip rarely sends a positive message. It may be perceived as an attempt at intimidation. It may cause real pain. Either way, it is not conducive to initiating a win-win negotiation.
  - Support your grip with other consistent nonverbal messages.
  - Smile and look the other person straight in the eye to signal honesty and friendliness.
  - Slight up and down movement emphasizes the strength of the relationship. However, you should never forcefully shake the other person's hand up and down like an old water pump. That is normally considered excessive. It can also be painful.
- Use a handshake after agreement to symbolically seal the agreement and set the stage for a positive continuing relationship.



- Consider emphasizing the warmth and importance of your continued relationship by:
  - Briefly prolonging the handshake;
  - Grasping the person's hand between both your hands; or
  - Grasping the forearm, elbow, or even the upper arm of the other party as you shake hands.
  - Use a smile and positive words to dispel any tensions that may have built up during negotiations.
  - Failing to offer a handshake could seriously damage any hope for positive continuing relationship.

*Handshake Differences.* Be careful as you interpret handshake cues. As with other nonverbal messages, you should consider the possible effect of cultural differences.

- In some Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, a gentle grip is preferred over the executive grip.
- In some Asian cultures, direct eye contact during the handshake is discouraged.
- In Islamic cultures, men never offer to shake hands with women. Touching between unrelated men and women is forbidden.
- In the United States, some women extend their hand with the palm down preferring to only grasp fingers rather than use the executive grip. However, most business women prefer the executive grip when shaking hands with men or women, and many are offended when someone only grasps their fingers.