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Getting Results Beyond Words

By Liz Tahir



How often have you felt you were communicating clearly, only to find you have sent the wrong message? This can happen because we are concentrating on what we say (verbal) instead of how we are saying it (nonverbal).

The delivery of a message is as integral as the words in a message. We can't persuade others to our point of view when we send a mixed message. How does that happen? It happens because when there is an inconsistency between the nonverbal and the verbal messages, the receiver will overwhelmingly choose to believe the nonverbal to be the correct meaning.

Researchers have said that 75% of communication is nonverbal. Some feel strongly that this figure is as high as 90%. Yet we spend most of our time and effort concentrating on the verbal part of our negotiation, which will have only a 10 to 25% impact on the outcome of our communications. Nonverbal messages can be communicated by a handshake, smile, gesture, body motion, tone of voice, the look in the eye, touch, scent, environment, body adornment, and personal space.

The ways we communicate

Vocal performance is the intonation, the projection of your voice, combining words with the way you deliver them. For example, if you speak in a dull monotone, show little energy and have an expressionless face, are you likely to convince us that your point of view is the one we should embrace? Of course not. But the very same words spoken with real enthusiasm, maybe with a dash of urgency thrown in, have a much greater chance of winning us over.

Gestures are so important that you can throw your opponent off by using them. Years ago, as a retail buyer, I was sent to discuss a less-than-satisfactory bonus with the company treasurer and Chief

Financial Officer, Frank Buescher—the final word on such matters. I carefully prepared and was confident in presenting my case for why I was due a higher bonus.

The other male executives in this upscale department store were out of GQ, but not Frank Buescher. He was a slightly disheveled man, often with part of his shirt hanging over his pants, and his tie a little askew. He was always pleasant and down to earth, with an absentminded air, and said to be a financial genius, usually getting the better of mall developers, bank officers, or vendor factors.

Buescher invited me to sit down and tell him about my situation. Then he lit his usual cigarette. I started talking, and then noticed that he never, ever flicked the ashes off the cigarette, just held it between his fingers, moving it back and forth to his lips. Soon I was enthralled in this cigarette with the long ashes. Was he going to burn himself, or the carpet, or maybe the store? Why didn't he flick off the ashes? It was not long before my complete attention was diverted and I lost my focus. Lesson learned. A well-calculated gesture can throw your counterpart off base and help you win a negotiation. (Years later, Mr. Buescher admitted that the ashes-on-cigarette was his favorite negotiating tactic!)

The eyes have it in the bag

We tend to feel someone who avoids looking us in the eye is trying to hide something or isn't telling the truth. Eye contact is so important in the U.S. culture that if someone we are talking with is wearing sunglasses, we are a little thrown off and feel the "real" person is being hidden from us. But we must realize that other cultures don't put as much stock in eye contact. The Japanese, for instance, are uncomfortable sustaining direct eye contact for long periods. They will tend to look away or focus on the ear or chin of their counterpart. On the other hand, someone who wants to convey anger or intimidation can do so by maintaining piercing eye contact.

Hot tips

Play a game with yourself the next time you greet someone. Tell yourself you want to remember the color of that person's eyes. Then you will have a direct, interested gaze that is guaranteed to draw that person to you because you have just made them feel important!

One sure way to convey that you disagree with a message you just heard is the "wince." This is an animated facial flinch, clearly stating (without your uttering a word) your negative reaction; maybe the price you were just quoted or the terms of the deal. Wincing at the right time can help you get what

you want. What should you say after your wince? Nothing. Wait for a reaction. The other party will likely change something in order to invoke a more favorable response from you,

Suppose you are not the *wincer*, but the *wincee*. How should you react? Same advice: silence. Don't jump in with a counter offer. The person who speaks first will likely be the one who gives in.

Moving in

When someone likes you or agrees with you, they will tend to stand closer to you or, if seated, lean toward you. Someone who is uncertain about you or in disagreement with you will position their body away from you. **If you want to convey that you are truly interested in your counterpart, lean slightly toward them.** Obviously, you don't want to get unsociably close, as that definitely sends the wrong message.

Figure out how to draw attention to yourself, to show you're in control. The meek may indeed inherit the earth, but they don't prevail at negotiations. Jane, a professional speaker, always insists on speaking from a raised platform, never coming down into the audience. She wants to have all eyes on her, to be seen as the authority. Jane says that once she walks into the audience, folks no longer have a full view of her and she begins to lose them.

So remember: in a negotiation, language can take two forms: verbal and nonverbal. Make these elements compatible and you will greatly strengthen your chance for success every time.

About the author:

Liz Tahir honed her negotiating skills through years of making multimillion deals in company boardrooms to bargaining for a brass bauble in a Turkish bazaar. A former corporate executive, she has for the past 18 years headed Liz Tahir & Associates as a marketing consultant, conference speaker, and business writer. Liz has delivered seminars and workshops from Japan to Brazil, on improving negotiating skills for better success in today's international marketplace. For more information about her services, go to <http://www.liztahir.com>,

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