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Movin' On Up:

Nine Body Language Dos and Don'ts to Help You Win in the Business World

If you're not winning the jobs, clients, or sales you think you deserve, you might want to take a closer look at what you're saying—not just verbally, but nonverbally. Sharon Sayler explains that your body language is just as important as the words you use. She provides a few helpful tips to help you move (pun intended!) ahead of your competition.

Hoboken, NJ (August 2010)—Today's business world is more competitive than ever. As the economy continues to struggle, competition for jobs, clients, sales—you name it—continues to be tight. If you're sure that you've been saying all the right things, but you still can't get ahead, author Sharon Sayler suggests you consider what you've really been saying to potential employers or customers—not just verbally, but nonverbally. She explains that while you might be *saying*, "I'm the person for the job," the message you're conveying through your body might be very different.

"Have you ever heard the expression, 'It's not what you're saying—it's how you're saying it'?" asks Sayler, a certified group dynamics and behavioral coach and author of *What Your Body Says (and how to master the message): Inspire, Influence, Build Trust, and Create Lasting Business Relationships* (Wiley, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-470-59916-7, \$22.95, www.WhatYourBodySays.com).

"Well, that's true not only with verbal messages but with your unspoken (nonverbal) messages as well. Words are only a small part of communication. The most influential parts of communication are your nonverbals. And in an ideas-based economy like the one we have today, your ability to influence others and get them to really listen to you is what will set you apart from the majority in your profession or industry. Your nonverbals play an important role in making that happen."

What Your Body Says (and how to master the message) gives you the tools to fully master your messages. Laying out simple methods that are easy to use and remember, this helpful guide offers a proven approach based on Sayler's years of research and practice. You'll learn an array

of techniques you can use in a variety of situations, allowing you to communicate with more clarity, inspiration, and influence.

“True communication goes beyond words, and great communicators use every tool they have to deliver their message,” says Sayler. “When you have control of your nonverbal language, you can communicate confidence with passion, persuasion, credibility, and candor—factors that will help you soar above your competition in the business world.”

Read on for a few nonverbal dos and don'ts:

Don't fill the air with *um, ah, uh, and you know.* It is natural to pause when you speak—it gives you a chance to breathe. What's not natural is to fill the silent pause with *um, ah, uh, you know*, and other sounds. Verbal pauses are distracting and muddle what you are trying to say, because the audience sees you searching for the next words. Meaningless extra syllables or words make you look less intelligent. Your message will be more effective once you eliminate them. This may take practice.

“If you say a word and hang on it before you actually know what you're going to say next, it becomes a bridge word,” says Sayler. “The *ums, ahs, uhs, and you knows* are warning signs that you need to breathe. When you run out of oxygen and your brain starts feeding unintelligible words to your mouth, stop talking and start breathing. Working to eliminate the verbal pause may feel uncomfortable at first. However, the number of times you use it will decrease the more you practice. Practice often means saying a verbal pause and noticing that you did it. If you catch yourself doing it less often, then you are making progress. Eventually, the silent pause will replace the verbal pause. Remember, you don't have to fill every minute of airtime with noise.”

Don't use the fig-leaf pose. By placing your hands to cover the groin region, you're making yourself look visually smaller. “When you place your hands in the fig-leaf pose, your body says, ‘I'm harmless,’ or, ‘I'm afraid,’” explains Sayler. “Not exactly the way to convey the level of confidence that a new employer might want to see in a new hire or that a client wants to see in the genius he needs to help improve his business.”

Do use hand gestures systematically. When we use only words to convey our message, we make it necessary for our audience to pay very close attention to what we say. Using gestures systematically, especially when giving directions or teaching, makes the audience less dependent on the verbal part of the presentation. The visual reminder created by gestures allows the listener two ways to remember: auditory and visual. It thereby increases the likelihood of accurate recall.

Don't put your hands in your pockets. Thumbs hanging off the pockets and hands deep in both pockets both say something similar to the fig-leaf hand gesture, “Geez, I hope you like me.” Hands deep in the pockets jingling change say one of two things, depending on context: “Geez, I'm nervous and hope you like me,” or, “Geez, I'm so bored. Is this ever going to be over?”

“Pockets and waistbands can convey multiple meanings depending on where the hands or thumbs are placed,” says Sayler. “Thumbs tucked in the waistband usually say, ‘I am staking my

territory,' which is a gesture of power, not influence. Thumbs displayed while the hands are tucked in the pockets say, 'I know I am superior and I believe I have dominance.' Pockets and waistbands are not a good place to rest your hands in business situations. You want to convey to those you work with or hope to work with that you are confident in yourself and those around you."

Don't hide your hands behind your back. Depending on the situation, grasping your hands behind your back can be interpreted as meaning, "Geez, I hope you like me," or, "You better fear me." Neither interpretation leaves a very good impression of you so avoid this position altogether. "This can be a tough movement to break because it feels so comfortable and natural to us," says Sayler. "People often do not know what to do with their hands, so they will start with the fig leaf, and then when they realize where their hands are, they will quickly move their hands behind their backs. The best way to break yourself of this habit is to practice being comfortable with your hands straight down by your sides—after all it is the natural place for them to be. Take notice of when you use this movement. Once you know what kind of situation elicits this motion, you can begin to consciously break yourself of the habit."

Don't cross your arms. This stance is most frequently understood to indicate upset or discomfort. In business, others often interpret it as, "I am not open to discussion," or, "I am annoyed."

"People habitually cross their arms over their chests when listening or waiting, so this gesture can be a hard one to overcome," notes Sayler. "Those who know us well may look at our arms across our chest and make nothing of it, thinking, *Oh that's just what John does when he listens.* Since the crossed-arms gesture is one of the most misinterpreted nonverbals, don't do it. Why give others the chance to misunderstand?"

Do know when to put your hands on your hips. This is a *ready-to-take-action* gesture—think gunfight at the OK Corral. It makes most people appear bigger, because they are actually taking up more space. Yet, it is often given negative labels by others, such as meaning you are annoyed, closed, or won't listen, similar to placing your arms across your chest.

"You have to be careful when you place your hands on your hips, because it is interpreted differently depending on the situation," says Sayler. "It might be a great way to convey to a potential employer after an interview that you are ready for the challenges ahead. But use it during a difficult meeting with a client, and he might think you are nonverbally voicing your annoyance with him. Again, it's important to be aware of when *you* are most likely to use this motion."

Do remember the eyes have it. Of all the nonverbal messages one can use, the eyes are the most expressive and really are the window to thoughts and emotions. Little or no eye contact is often thought to be associated with lying, but this is not always true. Experienced liars will look you right in the eye every time. It might also indicate lack of self-esteem or interest. "Obviously, none of these are messages you want to convey in your professional life," says Sayler. "To use direct eye contact in a business situation, position your eyes between the listener's eyes or just a bit higher. Imagine a triangle with the base below the listener's eyes and the peak of the triangle

at his mid-forehead. Keep your eyes in the middle of the triangle to maintain a professional contact. As to how much or how long to hold eye contact, take your cues from the other person: If he likes a lot of eye contact, do the same. If the listener breaks eye contact on occasion, it is acceptable to break eye contact to the same degree.”

Do stop fidgeting. Unintentional gestures are emotional reactions or the result of the body’s desire for physical comfort and are often lovingly called fidgets. Even though fidgets can calm us, those pesky, jerky movements or anxious behaviors often make others uneasy.

“Because they often become habits, they can be difficult to stop, so people usually try to disguise them,” notes Sayler. “Adjusting a cuff link, rubbing an earlobe, and picking lint off clothes are just a few examples of the infamous fidget. The quickest way to calm yourself without a fidget or two is by pushing your own internal fidget reboot button: your breathing. Since you’re nervous—and fidgety or anxious nonverbal behaviors are so automatic—it can take a bit more effort to be aware you are doing them. If you know you will be entering a ‘fidget’ situation, make an effort to become consciously aware of, and control, your breathing. Once you are aware, breathe with low, full abdominal breaths. The purpose is to bring the carbon dioxide and oxygen levels back in balance. Remember to maintain low, slow abdominal breathing.”

“When it comes to inspiring and influencing others, we can say all the right words, but if our nonverbal postures send a different message, that is what others will understand and take away,” says Sayler. “True communication goes beyond words, and great communicators use every tool they have to deliver their message. When you learn to communicate not only through what you say but also through what your body says, you can build stronger relationships, become a more influential leader, and receive enthusiastic responses from potential employers, clients, and colleagues. You will start coming in loud and clear!”

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About the Author:

Sharon Sayler, MBA, is author of *What Your Body Says (and how to master the message): Inspire, Influence, Build Trust, and Create Lasting Business Relationships* (Wiley, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-470-59916-7, \$22.95, www.WhatYourBodySays.com). She teaches people how to speak and present to be remembered. As a certified group dynamics and behavioral coach, Sharon trains, counsels, and coaches professionals to become stronger, more influential communicators and leaders. Sharon is an active contributor to SelfGrowth.com, has, for the past two-and-a-half years, written the weekly blog *Best Impressions*, and is host of [BlogTalkRadio](http://BlogTalkRadio.com)’s *Beyond Lip Service*.

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About the Book:

What Your Body Says (and how to master the message): Inspire, Influence, Build Trust, and Create Lasting Business Relationships (Wiley, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-470-59916-7, \$22.95, www.WhatYourBodySays.com) is available at bookstores nationwide, major online booksellers, or directly from the publisher by calling 800-225-5945. In Canada, call 800-567-4797.

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