

EVERY “BODY” HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

Reading customers body language

Great salespeople become masters at reading their customers. In addition to finely honed listening skills, they pick up on the subtle nuances of their prospect's body language. An instinctive understanding of human body language enables them to discern the prospect's attitude toward the material being presented. Using this knowledge, they can alter their presentation strategy to suit individual customers increasing their ability to sell them. A great deal of scientific research has been done on this subject. Professional sales trainer Tim Connor distilled the following “vocabulary” from this research. It is a good introduction to this important subject

Openness

- Open hands
- Taking coat off
- Moving closer
- Leaning forward
- Uncrossed legs
- Arms gently crossing lower body

Enthusiasm

- Slight smile
- Erect body stance
- Hands open, arms extended, eyes wide and alert
- Lively and bouncy voice, well-modulated

Defensiveness

- Rigid body
- Arms/legs crossed tightly
- Minimal eye contact
- Pursed lips
- Head down with chin depressed toward chest
- Fists clenched
- Fingers clenching crossed arms
- Leaning back in chair

Suspicion/secretcy

- Failing to make eye contact.
Resisting your glances
- Glancing sideways at you
- Rubbing or touching nose
- Squinting or peering over glasses

Rejection/doubt

- Touching and rubbing nose
- Squinting or rubbing eyes
- Arms and legs crossed
- Body withdrawn
- Throat-clearing
- Hand-rubbing or ear-tugging
- Raising eyebrows

Contemplation

- Slightly tilted head
- Sitting on the front portion of the chair with upper torso forward
- Hand-to-cheek gesture
- Stroking chin or pulling beard

Nervousness

- Clearing throat
- Hand-to-mouth movements

- Covering mouth when speaking
- Tugging at ear
- Darting eyes
- Twitching lips or face
- Playing with objects, fidgeting
- Shifting weight while standing
- Tapping fingers
- Waving foot
- Pacing

Anger

- Body rigid
- Fists clenched
- Lips closed and held in a thin line
- Continued eye contact with dilation of pupils

- Squinting of eyes
- Shallow breathing

Needing reassurance

- Pinching the fleshy part of hands
- Gently rubbing or caressing some personal object like a ring or a watch
- Biting fingernails or examining cuticles

Boredom/indifference

- Head in hand
- Droopy eyelids
- Relaxed posture, slouching
- Tapping foot or fingers
- Swinging feet
- Blank stares, little eye contact

Some final thoughts:

Reading body language is as much an art as it is a science. Sometimes you will get a false signal (I once had a customer who constantly shifted his weight from one leg to another. Normally this indicates nervousness but in this case the customer had an injury) You'll notice that certain behaviors can indicate several different attitudes (Arms crossed). You need to use all the body language clues in conjunction with the prospect's words and verbal inflections to get an accurate picture of their response to your presentation. Look for changes in body language that may indicate that you are gaining or losing ground with the customer.

You can also use this information to pay attention to the non-verbal messages you are sending to the client. If your body language screams "I'm nervous!" it will be impossible to communicate confidence in our product no matter what you say! Being conscious of this and "Fake it 'til you make it!" Prospects are much more inclined to buy from enthusiastic reps. When you adjust your body language to project enthusiasm you will be amazed at the impact this will have on your sales production. A corollary benefit of adopting positive body language is that the messages your body language sends to your brain will positively affect your attitude.

Developing an awareness of body language is difficult but it is a surefire way to avoid conflict and increase your earnings.