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Read Body Language and Reduce Stress

Read Body Language Accurately



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Introduction

Frequently human beings focus mainly on what is said. This includes times they are considering the words to use to compile a text message or email, or the words they choose when talking with another person. Verbal communication is necessary for human interaction. This is why it is so important to learn how to both speak and listen effectively. However, it is classically thought that 93% of the way that human beings interact is nonverbal, through facial and body language expressions.

The consequences of understanding the importance of body language in conflict resolution are astounding. If 93% of communication is nonverbal, then it is easy to understand why it is what the other person attends to mainly. It is more important than what is said and can be the deciding factor in alleviating or escalating conflict.

The Role of Body Language in Conflict

Body language varies by cultural context, but there are certain emotional expressions that are universally recognized across cultures. Humans recognize these emotions and react to them either causing, exacerbating, or easing conflict. It is possible to learn how to react nonverbally to these expressions to ease or avoid conflict.

First it is essential to recognize the six universally recognizable emotional expressions:

1. Happiness
2. Sadness
3. Fear
4. Disgust
5. Surprise
6. Anger

These emotions may be expressed in diverse ways in different cultures. For example, it appears that in the Chinese culture sticking out one's tongue is a gesture of surprise; conversely, Canadians show surprise by rounding their mouths slightly. However, both cultures maintain the distinctive widening of the eyes and drop of the jaw. Therefore, it is essential to know the other person's culture to alleviate conflict before the fact.

It is imperative to understand the context of the expression and the accompanying body language. Accepting what your own body language will communicate in response to another's actions is vital to alleviate or minimize conflict.

What Your Body Says

It is important to understand the kind of message you are sending with your facial and body expressions. This understanding can be an important skill to have whether or not you are in a conflicted situation. Understanding the unspoken messages you send helps you to better watch and understand these messages in other people.

Facial and body expressions are often involuntary and show a person's true emotions. Understanding this means that if, for example, you notice one of your co-workers laughing at a crude joke another of your co-workers made while standing with her arms crossed tightly in front of her chest, you will be better equipped to determine that she has most likely been made uncomfortable by the joke. This observation cues you to refrain from demonstrating genuine enjoyment.

You may question, "How do you spot genuine enjoyment and other emotions simply by observing facial and body expressions?"

Reading True Emotional Reactions

There are emotional clues which are essential to recognize. You may think you are not adept at reading others' body language but you can learn. The following descriptions are designed to be help.

Happiness

Happiness is commonly exhibited by smiling (upturned lips) that usually shows the teeth and is accompanied by eyes that are crinkled at the corners. Most people can tell if a person is genuinely happy in a situation. There are a variety of body expressions that can go along with happiness, such as bouncing, hugging oneself, or showing affection toward another person, just to name a few.

Smiles that are made with lips tightly pressed together or where the person is grimacing are not smiles of happiness.

Sadness

Sadness is noted when the eyes and lips droop. Sometimes the brow furrows. Sadness is one of the most obvious emotions because it often includes an obvious visual body expression such as crying.

This is not to suggest that all people cry when they are sad. Other expressions of sadness are physical withdrawal, gazing downward, and putting the hands over the face.

Fear

Fear is displayed when a person raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes, as well as the parting of the lips. Body expressions of fear include the fight or flight mechanism, crossed arms or legs, or wringing of hands.

Disgust

Disgust or contempt is noted when a person sneers and raises one corner of his mouth. This is an especially dangerous emotion to show in a conflict as it can indicate that negotiations are breaking down. Body expressions of disgust involve waving the hand and turning away from the person, looking at your watch or the clock on your cell phone, eye rolling, or shrugging.

Surprise

Surprise is portrayed with a person raises his eyebrows high, and opens his mouth and eyes wide. Body expressions of surprise include taking a step back, covering one's mouth with a hand, and hopping or jumping up and down.

Anger

When a person is angry he will furrow his brow and draw his eyebrows toward each other. He may narrow his eye and press his lips together while clenching his jaw. Body expressions of anger also include leaving the situation, throwing something, or clenching and unclenching his hands.

Facial expressions are almost always accompanied by complementary body expressions, and when the two are at odds, as in the example of the coworker laughing at the joke, you would ask yourself what is really happening in the situation.

In conflicted situations, where people commonly try to control the amount of anger or contempt they show, facial and body expressions are often at odds. However, being able to spot these expressions opens the door to honest conversation about what is going on.

Using Body Language to Effectively Manage Conflict

As stated earlier, it is important to remember that using the right body language can help de-escalate or avoid conflict. Knowing your own common expressions and what body language to use is often the key to getting along with other people. This applies in a variety of situations, friendly and otherwise.

Conflict escalates when one party behaves in what the other party perceives to be a threatening manner. Anger plays an essential role in body language, particularly in conflicted situations.

Reacting to Anger

One of the first things to do if you feel yourself becoming angry is to work to focus your energy and remain calm while you continue to breathe at a normal rate. This is often easier said than done. Remember not to hold your breath. Take the time you need to confidently, not aggressively, respond to statements. This can break the cycle of anger in a conflict.

However, if you feel that you are unable to control your anger, take a time out from the discussion and leave the situation. Do this even if the other person does not react kindly to your decision. In the long run, avoiding an angry situation will help minimize a conflict.

Reacting to Disgust

Disgust is another emotion that is often prominent in conflicted situations and hard to control once it shows itself. Conflict escalates once disgust is present. Disgust usually means that one party has lost respect for the other party and has come to a point where their willingness to negotiate has started to break down.

For example, instead of rolling your eyes the next time you and the other person get in a fight over who has a heavier workload, you could simply listen. Different gestures can determine the direction conflict takes.

Handling a conflict in a positive manner does not mean that you must only display positive emotions. However, it does mean that you must work at controlling where your negative emotions take you.

Final Comment

Understanding how these basic emotions are commonly displayed will not make you an expert on understanding facial or body expression. Neither will it enable you to deal with all kinds of conflict. However, it will prepare you to understand other people's true messages and give you the time to decide how to respond constructively.

Being able to identify an emotion accurately doesn't mean that you will be able to understand why it is there. You will only know that it is. You need to talk with the person as well as listen to his responses to understand his version of the story.

The key is to listen actively, appreciate the other person's point of view and truly understand the person's real message.