

Reading Body Language for the Sales Professional

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by Dennis R. Kyle

Body language is a fascinating skill. People rarely recognize how much information they give off and how noticeable it is to the human eye. Even to the untrained human eye.

I can remember coming home from school as a child after having a tough day and seeing my mother. Instantly she would look at me, and ask, "What is a matter?" I know for a fact the majority of the time, I would answer, "Nothing." However, her keen exploration would soon make me realize that I had a negative attitude.

In sales, it is vitally important to read body language. There are four major areas of body language you need to observe.

1. Eye Contact and Brow Movement
2. Facial Gestures
3. Torso and Arm Behavior
4. Leg Activity

Eye Contact and Brow Movement

Let's look at Eye Contact and Brow Movement closely. No pun intended of course. While in a seminar a few weeks ago, a participant asked me a question. After I answered her, I asked the clarifying question, "Does that answer your question?" She answered me with a stuttering "Yes," however; as she answered me her brows were scrunched together demonstrating negative energy. She also glanced away several times rapidly. By noticing her gestures it was obvious she did not understand me.

Let's take a look at positive and negative indicators:

Positive Behaviors

- Direct Eye Contact – Interested, likes you
- Smiling Eyes – Is comfortable
- Relaxed Brow – Sign of Relaxation

Negative Behaviors

- Limited or No Eye Contact – Lying, uninterested, too confined, uncomfortable, distracted
- Tension in Brow – Confusion, tension, fear

There may be several reasons why someone is unable to hold eye contact. Now, I'm not talking about staring at someone either. Notice when you are interested how much eye contact you give

and why you look away. It can simply be that you are distracted, for example a bird flies by and catches your eye. When people are not able to tell you their honest feelings they most often cannot hold eye contact.

Another reason for losing someone's eye contact is when you step into someone's personal space (and each of us has a different size boundary); their natural sign is to look away. Check it out for yourself. Test some people (make sure you know them fairly well, you don't want to get bopped on the head for invading personal space): walk toward your friend and see how close you can get before their eyes dart away. Also note that the same person has different boundaries for different people, thus the tighter your friendship usually the closer you are able to get.

You have it in you to recognize these signs easily. Focus your attention and see what other indicators you can come up with this week. I would enjoy hearing your results.

Facial Gestures

Facial Gestures are the second part of body language to read. The most important part of facial gestures is the mouth. Upward turns in the corner of the mouth are most often positive signs and downward turns or flat lines in the mouth demonstrate negative behavior. Observe the person's lips to see if they are pressed together or relaxed and comfortable. Do they show signs of happiness or signs of discontentment? A person's cheeks and dimple structure are also important to watch.

The most important thing to understand about reading facial behavior is that we all have the ability. Most people however never pay close attention to human tendencies and activities. Success in sales requires you to observe human behavior.

Arm and Torso Movements

The third important factor in reading human body language is monitoring arm and torso movements. Simple rule to remember is: "Closed-off posture usually means close-minded attitude and open posture means exactly what the name eludes, open or willing attitude." I know you are thinking, "Okay, Mr. Genius now that you have told me the obvious what does that mean?"

Closed-Off Posture

- Shoulders hunched forward – lacking interest or feeling inferior
- Rigid Body Posture – anxious, uptight
- Crossed arms – can be just cold or protecting the body from your discussion
- Tapping Fingers – agitated, anxious, bored
- Fidgeting with hands or objects (i.e., pen) – bored or has something to say

When these signs appear, don't take judgment on yourself or them it's simply time to take a break and see what that person is thinking.

Open Posture

- Leaning forward – interested
- Fingers Interlocked placed behind the head leaving elbows open and armpits exposed – very open to ideas, comfortable
- Mirroring you – likes you and wants to be friendly
- Still – more interested in what you are saying than anything

Reading body language is nothing more than paying attention to actions we see everyday and usually don't process.

Leg Activity

The fourth factor to observe is leg activity. Again this is another area, which is relatively easy to observe once you know what to monitor. Usually negative behavior is observed through fidgety leg movements and uneasiness. There is no direct correlation between crossed and uncrossed legs. However, if you notice a person has their legs crossed and one of them is bouncing on the other it probably is anxiety.

Leg activity needs to be observed simultaneously with arm position. If you notice a person is bouncing their legs and their arms are crossed over or their torso is slumped over, the buyer most likely is closed-off.

Being successful in sales does not require a rocket science degree, not that it's bad of course if you have one. Your success depends upon how well you can modify your personal behavior to adapt to situations. And check in with the individual, STOP talking, and ask them what they think.

If you notice a person is closed-down, you need to focus on one thing. What do you need to do to increase the person's comfort zone?

The easiest way to increase a person's comfort when they are closed-off is to first utilize mirroring.

Mirroring is a technique by which you observe a person's behavior and then in a subtle way act the same way they are acting. If their arms are crossed over you should sit back relax a little, and then begin to cross your arms.

A psychologist from California University performed a study on mirroring. Two different teachers taught the students a process. One used mirroring; the other did not. It was overwhelming that the teacher using mirroring techniques was believed to be much more

successful, friendly, and appealing by the students.

So as you look to the future it is going to require that you practice, practice, practice observing people. Remember, reading body language needs to be done carefully. Unlike verbal communication, body language can be rather abstract. However, it will lend itself to be a very good benchmark to human behavior and attitude.

You already have the intuitive skills to learn the art of reading body language. Now you must become more conscious of the subtle signs your prospects and clients give off.

When you notice positive body language, keep on track and move in the direction of closure. If negative vibrations are being sent to you, step back and redefine your objective internally and externally.

One of the best tips I have for you to help create more positive energy is to continually reiterate ideas and validate understanding. Simply review what you have discussed with your prospect already and validate it by asking clarifying questions.

For instance:

Seller: Mrs. Jones we have discussed a variety things related to project implementation and pricing structures. We will initiate the project on Dec. 1 and it will run for 16 consecutive weeks concluding on March 31. There are 7 consultants scheduled to be on the project alternating with three people available full-time. The estimated investment is \$98,235.00. Does this make sense to you?

Buyer: Yes it does!

(Observe body language. Don't just assume because the person said "yes" it means 'yes'. You have to watch their eye contact, facial gestures for positive signs, torso and arms to make sure they are open, and finally if they have any noticeable fidgety behaviors in their legs or feet. If you determine quickly this is a sincere yes, offer an opportunity for questions. If there are any doubts in your mind address them now before moving forward. Let's take a look at both ideas.)
Noticeable Doubt:

Seller: Mrs. Jones I notice there may be a few things you're not clear on, what issues do I need to explain further?

(Believe me in most cases when you observe body language and observe it with true compassion and desire to understand, your intuition won't serve you wrong. The client or prospect will have some issues, and they will appreciate you recognizing them. Learning how to define issues early on in a relationship forges a happy road to success. Once the person starts to open up to you with concerns, resolve those concerns immediately.)

Buyer: Well there are a few things regarding...



Seller: (answer all questions and clear up doubt).

Decisive Yes or After You Cleared Up Doubt:

Seller: Mrs. Jones, I'd like to open this discussion to any questions you may have regarding the finalization of this project.

(It is vitally important to pause when you open the floor to the individual. Any more words out of your mouth will taint the discussion. The power of your questions is not only in the proper delivery of the question, but how well can you shut-up after you ask it.)

Body Language for Salespeople

As a sales professional reading body language can give you the edge you need to close the sale. Utilize body language signals given by your prospects to ask better questions. The stronger you are a reading body language and questioning skills the more sales you will win.