

Without Words - Body Language and Selling

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I don't know if I can ever cross my arms across my chest again, even though it is a comfortable position, or unless I'm suspicious because apparently it is a mannerism perceived as suspicious, according to Dorothy Leeds. In an article entitled "Positive Body Language: Increase Your Sales Without Saying a Word", she suggests eight steps to better body language, including be prepared, watch your posture, make an entrance, make eye contact, dress to suit the occasion, control your hands, smile, and don't hide behind your glasses.

Leeds also says openness and cooperation can be demonstrated with open hands, by an unbuttoned coat and tilted head as well as by sitting on a chair's edge. (What if sitting on a chair's edge indicates to someone that you are ready to bolt at the slightest chance?)

Leeds noted that Albert Mehrabian "has said we are perceived three ways: 55% visually, 38% vocally and 7% verbally." Not good news for a writer-type like me who is much better with the words (especially if they are written instead of spoken) than with the hale and hearty handshake and impressive visual presentation. Although, I could never sell anything to anyone, in person or on the phone, I'm glad to present the facts and then let the person receiving those facts make up his or her mind. Actually, that's what I usually want from any salesperson. Just the facts, no spin. I have bought a vacuum cleaner in spite of the salesperson because of the facts. The hard sell drove me out the door, but I came back and bought it anyway. That salesperson obviously wasn't observing my body language as I backed away toward the door to escape.

Another time, several car salesmen lost sales when they talked only to my husband. I don't remember if I was smiling then or not. It is possible I was smiling since I usually don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. In that case, the smile is unreliable.

In a recent article called "More Than the Best Medicine" in the August 2000 issue of *Scientific American*, writer Meredith F. Small, a professor at Cornell University, reports on research on laughter by Vanderbilt University colleagues Jo-Anne Bachorowski and Moria Smoski as well as Cornell's Michael J. Owren. They want to know why we laugh.

She writes that Owren and Bachorowski "speculate that human laughter evolved as a unique way to make and break alliances."

More than likely this happened because a smile wasn't to be trusted. She writes: "First came the smile, which must have communicated a positive emotional state to someone else; our ancient ancestors probably used those smiles to reassure one another to build alliances. But of course, smiles can be faked, and so what evolved as an honest signal was probably soon corrupted. Enter laughing, a much more complex signal. Laughing involves more neural systems, the use of vocal apparatus and lots of energy. 'You have to be a much better actor to fake a laugh convincingly than fake a smile convincingly,' Owren says. And so laughing probably replaced smiling at some point in human history as an honest signal in coalition building."

So we can't confidently read a smile correctly and I know my body contradicts my feelings. The more I think about this body language stuff, I realize I will probably come down with some stress-related disease because I repress so much and my body actually will lie if it gets a chance. I think my words are much more reliable and I think it becomes a little more complicated than indicated by many writers, but I'm not a salesperson, negotiator, or social scientist.

In another article at salesdoctors.com, Art Siegel also notes that uncrossed arms and open hands signify openness. In his article, "Harnessing The Power of Body Language, Part 1," he writes "you have probably heard many times that people remember more of what they see than what they hear. Long after a meeting, we are likely to have forgotten the exact words someone used, but we may retain a vivid image of the same person's facial expression."

He also writes: "Through life experience we have learned, perhaps unconsciously, that people often lie with words. (We're talking here about the little white lies and omissions that are part of many conversations.) But facial expressions and other body language tend to be more honest. When a person's words and body language are consistent, we believe that person. When their words and body language say different things, we tend to believe the body language and doubt the words."

In this article, he outlines the vocabulary of both positive and negative body language. Most of it is intuitive, but he cautions that combinations of gestures and movements are more telling than an individual gesture. If I crossed my arms during the whole meeting or sales pitch it would more than likely signal that I was comfortable that way. However, if I started off the meeting by leaning forward with strong eye contact and then began to lean back and crossed my arms, that might indicate that I was demonstrating resistance.

If you are on the other end as the sales person or presenting an idea to someone, it is important to watch the body language of your client or customer. In his second part of "Harnessing the power of body language", he suggests matching that body language to put your audience at ease. He also believes that you can use body language to influence the way a customer feels. He believes positive body language is contagious.

In an article by Anitra Brown for office.com, called "Body Language Speaks Volumes," she quotes Don Rosenthal, president of a nonverbal communication training firm who counsels that leaning forward toward a client is a powerful way to demonstrate confidence in what you are saying. Any side-to-side movement is verboten. He says "that's the worst thing you can do. It indicates you're unsure of yourself."

Another article to check out at salesdoctors.com is "The Vocabulary of Sales Body Language" by Tim Connor. He states that boredom or indifference is indicated by head in hand, drooping eyelids, relaxed posture or slouching, tapping foot or fingers, swinging feet, little eye contact, doodling or slack lips.

As a writer, I am already a people watcher. However, I'm not very confident about my abilities to read a person like a book, so I guess my next step is to read Gerard I. Nierenberg's book, *How to Read a Person Like a Book*. Nierenberg was called "The Father of Negotiating Training" by *Forbes* and one of the "Eight Wise Men" by *The Wall Street Journal*.

The book supposedly helps one to decode nonverbal signals from strangers, friends, and business associates. My only hope is before I read this book and practice my body language decoding skills that people will just tell me what they are thinking. I hope they "use their words" to express themselves and realize that my crossed arms don't always mean displeasure or my smile doesn't always mean enthusiasm. And just because I'm doodling during a meeting doesn't mean I'm not paying attention. It helps me think.

With Words

I will switch from "without words" to "with words" regarding body language by discussing some of the euphemisms relating to the human body. One reference guide consulted is *Kind Words, A Thesaurus of Euphemisms* by Judith S. Neaman and Carole G. Silver. The first two chapters of this book cover euphemisms for parts of the body, forbidden territory and neutral territory. The essays contained in this book are entertaining as well as informative.

The authors state that religious euphemisms were among the first. But, given society's love-hate relationship with our bodies, I would imagine euphemisms for body parts followed shortly.

The authors write: "When Nathaniel Hawthorne died in 1864, his wife, Sophia Peabody, carefully edited his journals, removing all references to the leg and substituting the word 'limb.' And this was no wonder in an age when even piano limbs were discreetly covered and chairs wore skirts. By the 1920s, the female leg was, for the first time since ancient Greece, on public view."

In the 19th century, the English and then Americans used the term "white meat" to request the breast meat of poultry without using the word, "breast." Dark meat was used instead of thigh.

In 1959, life jackets were called Mae Wests, referring to the well-endowed wise-cracking blonde movie star. The posterior has many euphemisms: afters, after part, backside, seat, soft peat, backseat, rumble seat, rear, rear end, rear guard, behind, brunswick, caboose, derriere, latter end, hootenanny, keel, labonza, parking place, rusty-dusty, southern exposure, heinie and fanny. In the 1950s, a popular saying in America was "you're a pain in the francis." Bottom was used in 1794 by Erasmus Darwin, a British writer, in *Zoonomia*.

According to the authors, midriff originated in the Anglo-Saxon word for the middle of the belly - mid hrif- and referred to the diaphragm. "A Saxon leechbook of 1000 defines the midrif as the 'area lying between the womb and the liver.' The term survived in its technical anatomical meaning for centuries. In 1596, Shakespeare has a character insult Falstaff by saying, 'There's no room for faith, truth or honesty in this bosom of thine; it is filled up with guts and midriff' (*I Henry IV, III, iii, 175*)"

Tummy for stomach. Where did that begin? The authors state that the expression has been in the popular lexicon since 1868 when W.S. Gilbert in *Bab Ballads* asked: "Why should I hesitate to own/That pain was in his little tummy?"

Other names for the stomach, but not used much now, are the balcony, bay window, the basement, the false front, the front exposure, the frontage, the front porch, and the kitchen. It is also known as the bag, the basket, the bread basket, the dinner pail, the pot, the feedbox, the feedbag, the grublocker, or the furnace tank.

The parts of the body are used often in English idioms. Body idioms include phrases such as bad blood, jump down one's throat, straight from the shoulder, to pull one's leg, and to put on a brave face. Two web sites publish a list of body idioms in English with definitions at http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/h_idioma.htm or http://user.itl.net/~wordcraf/jse/body_i...

The origins of these idioms are varied. According to Charles Earle's *2107 Curious Word Origins, Sayings & Expressions from White Elephants to A Song & Dance*, the phrase "to save (or lose) face" means to "maintain (or lose) one's dignity, prestige, or at least a semblance of such dignity or prestige or esteem before others; to avoid humiliation or disgrace. The Chinese use only *tiu lien*, which means 'to lose face,' though they have another expression, 'for the sake of his face.'. It was the English residing in China who coined 'to save face,' and it is that expression, along with 'to save one's face,' that is in more common use."

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