



Simple Signals that Sabotage Clear Communication

Have you ever been in a conversation when the speaker is saying 'yes' but their body is saying 'no'? Research has determined that words only relay 7% of the message when you speak to someone. Your body language and tone of voice are actually 93% what is comprehended – does this explain the above scenario?

Your body is always communicating, whether you intend it to or not. There are two body language gestures that are guaranteed to distract or disturb the communication process within seconds. The first is actually taught in some MBA courses as a sign of confidence. While that is remotely true, it is interpreted by most people as confidence to the point of being arrogant. You've probably seen this gesture and might even use it on occasion; it's called steepling.

A steepling gesture is when you place your fingertips together to form a pyramid. Most people steeple while seated at a desk or table; some even do it standing up. In either event, it is perceived as highly negative and condescending by the receiver, or listener.

There are more subtle forms of steepling, too. While speaking at a leadership conference, I was approached by a gentleman who wanted to know what his gesture communicated. He touched his fingertips together but instead of a pyramid, his fingers were rounded like a spider on a mirror. I inquired as to whom he did this to – surprisingly, he steepled his boss. Then, when asked how he felt about her, he replied that he could do her job any day! Oops, his body is communicating what he is thinking. What is your body saying about you?

The second gesture is often used when people give presentations or speak in front of an audience. You've seen people stand in front of a group with their fingertips touching to form an inverted pyramid or oval. Amazingly, this gesture is also taught in public speaking courses as a way to channel nervous energy. In addition to looking completely goofy and unnatural, that gesture can have a negative meaning in sign language. If you do this with a hearing-impaired person who signs, expect confusion or even rebuttal. That gesture in sign language is slang for a name you might call your kitty cat...need I say more?

What then, you ask, is the best body language for clear communications? The answer is called the "power pose." To assume the position, stand with your feet about 10-14 inches apart – ladies, you, too – relax your arms to your sides and hold your shoulders back. The first time you try the power pose, it feels a bit awkward. Try it standing in

front of a mirror to get the full effect; although you may feel funny, you look credible and authoritative. With a little practice, the power pose becomes second nature. What is your body saying about you? That you are confident and in control – now you can concentrate on your words without worrying that your body is sabotaging your success.

Get more powerful communications ideas in “I Wish I’d Said That!” and “Dynamic Presentations Skills for Technical Experts” by Allison Adams Blankenship. Allison gives your teams hands-on tools that are immediately usable. Call 800-644-7641 or visit www.PrecisionSpeaking.com to find out how to bring Allison and these programs to your organization.