

# 5 Body Language Hacks That Make You Look Like A Leader

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You may have a leadership title – or tremendous leadership potential – but do you look like a leader? Influencing people’s perception of you is called impression management, and body language plays a key role.

Here are five body language hacks that make you look like a leader:

## 1. Start with your posture

Try this: Raise your shoulders toward your ears. Now roll them back. Now drop them down. Keeping this erect posture with your shoulders back and your head straight makes you look very sure of yourself.

Power and authority are nonverbally expressed by expanding into height and space. When you want to project leadership presence at a meeting, sit tall and claim your territory. Uncross your legs and place your feet firmly on the floor. Bring your elbows away from your body and widen your arm position. Your expanded body language will not only change the way people perceive you – it will influence the way you feel about yourself.

When you stand, be aware that if your feet are close together, you can look hesitant or unsure. But when you widen your stance, relax your knees, and center your weight in your lower body, you look more “solid” and credible.

## 2. Make sure you’re present

An up-and-coming manager was being groomed for a leadership position, but after attending a staff meeting, her boss took her aside. “Never do that again,” he said. “You didn’t look

like you were fully present. You didn't make eye contact with the speaker, you didn't join the discussion, and you certainly didn't look like a leader."

Her boss made a valid point. You can't project leadership presence if you aren't perceived as being present.

At every meeting you attend, make sure you stay engaged by actively participating, making eye contact with, and orienting your body toward, whomever is speaking,

### **3. Use gestures that signal leadership**

Leadership presence is enhanced by using smooth, controlled gestures between your waist and your shoulders. Warmth and openness are demonstrated by rotating hands with palms up at about a 45-degree angle, a way of indicating that you have nothing to hide. Moving your hands and arms away from the front of your torso is another way of indicating sincerity and security. The more you cover your body with folded arms or tightly-held hands, the more it appears you need to protect or defend yourself.

Authority is shown by rotating your hands palms-down, a nonverbal way of saying, "Hold that thought." The steeple gesture (where the tips of your fingers touch, but your palms are separated) is a sign that you're sure of what you're saying. As such, it can be very effective when you want to emphasize a certain point.

Gestures to avoid include the "fig leaf." Most people unconsciously clasp their hands in front of their lower body, creating a protective fig leaf effect. Whenever you use this gesture, especially during a formal presentation, it indicates that you're insecure or uncomfortable. A better choice would be to clasp your hands at waist level.

Gestures are a key part of how people perceive you. Using a

variety of gestures helps you connect with your audience. You're more compelling and convincing when you talk with your hands – as long as you know what they are saying.

## **4. Sound like a leader**

As a leader you can be sure that people will not only be listening to your words, they'll be evaluating how you say what you say.

Speaking loudly and quickly makes you sound confident – unless, of course, you are shouting, which makes you seem rude and insensitive. Speaking softly can be effective for signaling a confidential or very important message. But always make sure you are speaking with enough volume to be heard. And remember to enunciate and speak clearly.

Put enough emotion in your voice to avoid a monotone delivery that sounds as if you're bored or detached. I've heard leaders praise people in such a flat tone of voice that none of the recipients felt genuinely appreciated.

By the way, when you're speaking, don't be concerned with filling every moment with words. Instead, try pausing. It's unexpected, it's attention-getting, and it's effective . . . very effective.

## **5. Ace your business handshake**

In the workplace, warmth and welcome are transmitted by shaking hands, and this seemingly simple greeting may be what someone remembers most about meeting you. That's because touch is the most primitive and powerful nonverbal cue.

Be aware that people are personality judgments based on the kind of handshake you have. A weak handshake may mark you as "too timid for leadership." And the "bone crusher" – where a person squeezes too tightly – almost always gives the impression of being overbearing or insensitive. The perfect handshake is firm, with palm-to-palm contact, so that the web

of your hand (the skin between your thumb and first finger) touches the web of the other person's hand. The more skin you can contact, the more you come across as trustworthy and reliable.

Remember to offer your hand with your palm facing sideways. If you extend your hand with the palm up, it makes you look submissive. When you hold out your hand with the palm down, or if you twist your hand downward during the handshake, it sends the message that you feel superior. But when you offer your hand sideways, it sends a message of equality and self-confidence.

Try these five body language hacks. You may be surprised to find that these simple nonverbal cues can give a powerful boost your leadership presence by positively influencing the way others perceive you.



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