

Does Your Body Language Sabotage or Support Your Message?

Dianna Booher

The perception of “personal presence” dictates decisions and actions every day. People with presence look confident and comfortable, speak clearly and persuasively, think clearly even under pressure. They act with intention. People with presence reflect on their emotions, attitudes, and situations and then adapt. They accept responsibility for themselves and the results they achieve. People with presence are real. They present their genuine character authentically. What they say and do matches who they are.

And most of these emotions, attitudes, stresses – and even values and competencies – show up in their body language.

So What Does Body Language Contribute to the Essence of Presence?

Body language overshadows all other attributes of presence because it's the first thing observed—the “gatekeeper” component, so to speak. That is, although values and competence may be the most important over the long-term, if your body language turns people off, they may never take the time to know or trust you.

Consider How Your Body Language Might Undermine Your Words

Forget trying to fake your face. You can't do it, according to Dr. Paul Ekman, who has been studying facial expressions for more than forty years among cultures all over the world. Facial expressions are created with more than 52 facial

muscles. These muscles morph into more than 5,000 expressions that signal others what's going on inside your mind.

Consider the following examples of negative body language that may diminish you. At best, the various gestures may reveal secrets you don't want to communicate.

Does Your Body Language Say, "I'm Nervous; I Need Reassurance"?

Some gestures show stress: finger-tapping, foot-tapping or shuffling, hair-tossing, sleeve-adjusting, watch-band adjusting, lint-picking, ring-twisting, coffee-cup shuffling, leg twining, hugging yourself, hands rubbing neck, clasping your own hands in front of you or behind you (in imitation of having a parent hold your hand), pacing, and waving your hands randomly.

Others clutch props such as a handbag, portfolio, laptop, or file folder in front of themselves for "protection" as they stand or walk nervously in front of a group.

Does Your Body Language Say, "I'm Arrogant"?

The universally recognized gesture of arrogance or smugness is the raised chin. We frequently hear the cliché, "She walked by with her nose in the air." Other signs of arrogance: chest out and hands behind the head, steepled fingers, pointing fingers as if lecturing.

Does Your Body Language Say, "I'm Laid Back – or Bored?"

C-suite executives often assume what they consider a "laid-back" posture. As I coach them and give feedback that they look tired, they offer this reasoning: "Well, I don't want to intimidate employees. So I lean or stay low-key to connect better." A better approach: Stand relaxed, not rigid, but with feet in the "ready position" so your energy shows you believe

in what you're saying.

Does Your Body Language Say, "You're Disrespectful"?

The sarcastic eye roll or eye shrug as in "whatever" so typically delivered from teens to their parents conveys boredom, sarcasm, frustration, or lack of respect.

Does Your Body Language Say, "I'm Lying Now, So Don't Trust Other Things I Say"?

So what are the signs of lying? Sweating. Flushing. Increased swallowing. Irregular breathing. Hand-to-mouth and hand-to-nose touching. Either frequent blinking or a stare (the opposite of what's typical for the person). A frozen face (an attempt to be expressionless and not give away any secrets). Over time, such signals diminish personal credibility.

Body language always trumps words. Make sure your body doesn't betray you.



About the Author: *Dianna Booher's latest books include [Faster, Fewer, Better Emails](#); [Communicate Like a Leader](#); [What MORE Can I Say?](#); and [Creating Personal Presence](#). She's the bestselling author of 48 books, published in 61 foreign editions. Dianna helps organizations communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. She blogs for Forbes, Microsoft, and The CEO Magazine. For more information, please visit www.BooherResearch.com*