

Body Language 1

Starting a New Series of Articles

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

This is the first in a series of articles on the topic of body language. I normally publish my articles on the weekend but may skip a week now and then. I have no way of knowing how many articles will be in this series, but we might guess it will take over 100 weeks to fully explore this rich and vital topic area.

You can benefit from following this series because the ability to accurately interpret body language signals sent by other people (consciously or unconsciously) will give you a significant advantage in every interface. In addition, knowing what signals you are sending with your own body language will sharpen your skill at communicating with others accurately.

I have been studying Body Language for over 40 years, and I am still on a steep learning curve. The topic area is not only endlessly fascinating, it is vital for understanding other people well regardless of your position.

My curiosity for the topic was piqued in 1975 when I read the book [“How to Read a Person Like a Book,”](#) by Gerald Nierengberg and Henry Calero. The book gave a philosophy of how to read the thoughts and intentions of other people, even if you do not pay attention to the words.

My own experience amplified how important body language is when I was stationed in Guadalajara, Mexico, for a couple years early in my career. At first, I had no understanding of the language, but I found it possible to follow the discussions and arguments in meetings simply by paying attention to the voice inflections and body language of the participants.

Another source of understanding was a wonderful DVD produced by Bill Acheson from University of Pittsburgh. His humorous style and deep insights based on research about body language had me spellbound throughout his program entitled, [“Advanced Body Language.”](#)

I also became familiar with the work of [Albert Mehrabian](#): a psychology professor at UCLA, who reported a series of experiments in the mid 1960s. There is some confusion about the bottom line, but I understand his results showed that only 7% of meaning comes from the words we use. The other 93% come from a combination of the body language and tone of voice. It is important to point out that Mehrabian’s experiments only hold true when we are talking about our feelings or attitudes. This

conclusion was amplified well by Creativity Works in a little cartoon called "[Busting the Mehrabian Myth.](#)"

More recently I have used the internet where there are countless primers on body language. One example is [Psychology Today](#), which has many tips for understanding body language. There is also an excellent quiz in Greater Good Magazine for [how well you can read facial expressions](#). For additional resources, just type body language into your search engine, and you will find hundreds of other sites to explore.

These resources are just a sampling of the material I have digested on body language over four decades. The topic is truly endless in its interpretations. In this series I will share observations from my own work colored by what I have found in the external resources. Sometimes I will agree with the experts, and sometimes I will have a caution or even a contrary view.

Every person on the planet can benefit from becoming more aware of the signals being sent by other people. As a professional, you will be more alert and thus more successful as you gain skill in this mode of communications. We all interpret body language all the time, but the more you know the better your interpretations will be.

In each segment, I will link the specific gesture or topic to the concept of building or maintaining trust, since that is my primary area of professional interest. As we understand and practice greater body language control, we become more authentic. This control helps us build higher trust on a daily basis.

There are some precautions, however, when trying to interpret meaning from body language. It is rather easy to get a false signal and experience some confusion. I will be dealing with some of these problems in my article next week in what I call "The Five Cs of Interpreting Body Language."

For example, one of the Cs is that body language is culture specific. You cannot be sure that the meaning you ascribe to one type of body language in your culture is the same in other cultures. It can get very complex, so you need to be alert for the traps and keep studying.

I hope you will enjoy this series and benefit from it. Please also share any counterpoints you have to the ones I make. Also please share articles that are helpful to you with others so they can benefit from them. I am still learning and want to have the benefit of your views and observations along the way.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language." The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/Bodylanguage or on this blog.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 600 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years

as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763**

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