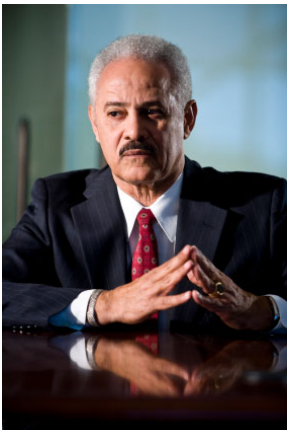


Body Language 5

Steepling

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Starting this week, I will be describing several body gestures or positions to indicate the classical meaning for each one and also some caveats on how they might be misinterpreted. The source of this information is numerous body language sites online plus a wonderful DVD on “Advanced Body Language” by Bill Acheson from the University of Pittsburgh. Here is a [link to the video](#) in case you might want to purchase it. Also some of the information was derived from books such as the famous “How to Read a Person Like a Book” by Gerard Nierenberg.



The first gesture is called “steepling.” This is a form of demonstrating power when two people are in conversation. The classic gesture is fingers together and palms apart. Usually the person with the higher power is the one doing the steepling and the higher the power the higher the steepling will be.

A typical example of when you might encounter steepling is when you are asking a superior for a favor. Suppose I am your manager, and you want to ask me for some extra vacation time because you have used up all your time and need an extra day. You come into my office and sit across the desk from me. I lean back and listen to you without saying anything but assuming a pose similar to this picture.

This body language indicates that I am listening politely, but I am not likely to grant your wish. If you see this kind of gesture, it means that the person demonstrating power over you, so it would be a good idea to back off and try a different approach at another time.

When standing, the higher the steeple, the greater the power differential. Also, women in positions of power will sometimes do a reverse steeple with fingers together and palms apart but the fingers are pointing downward.

If you are talking with a person of higher power and he or she starts to steeple, try asking a question that requires a verbal answer. That may break the steeple as the individual would be talking through his or her hands.

There is also a bouncing steeple motion where the fingers are separated and then brought back together. That would usually indicate impatience on the part of the listener, so if you see this, immediately give the other person the floor.

You may have noticed that Donald Trump is often seen using the steeping technique as well as the bouncing steeple to indicate impatience. His gestures are very marked. For example, Donald often sits with his arms crossed. It looks uncomfortable when wearing a suit, but it is how he habitually demonstrates his power. I will discuss arm crossing in a future article.

Some people use the steeping gesture a lot and others rarely use it. When you see it being done, it provides clues into what the other person is thinking. Steeping is rarely seen from a person in a lower status when talking with a superior. If you see this, some form of a coup is likely being attempted. Test to see what may be happening.

Excessive use of steeping will lower the trust between people because it represents a kind of power play. Try to use this gesture sparingly in your relations with others.

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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