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Looking Over Glasses

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Looking over the glasses has an unmistakable negative implication in most situations; however, there is a notable exception. When a person is wearing full-sized glasses or bifocals, a slight lowering of the head so the person can look at another individual while making a statement is a demeaning gesture. It has the same connotation as a parent talking down to or scolding an impudent child.



The physical gesture is often accompanied by a lowering of the tone of voice. It is a way for the individual to put down the other person or make him or her feel inferior, or at least insecure.

The caveat with this gesture is that some people wear half glasses and tend to look over the tops of the glasses all the time. This can be problematic, because the individual wearing the glasses may be sending signals to others that are not intended.

I know one female CEO who wears half glasses and puts them rather far down her nose. She needs the magnification for reading, but she is farsighted and does not need glasses to view the world beyond the page. In working with her, I observed that it was difficult to discern when she was being judgmental versus just having a neutral frame of mind. To be on the safe side, I found myself always on my guard when talking with her unless she took off her glasses completely. I basically found it difficult to trust her.

Some politicians have the same problem. I have found it hard to warm up to Chuck Schumer for that reason. If you go on Google Images and look him up, in every picture where he is wearing glasses, you can observe him looking over the top rim at the subject he is addressing. I think people recognize there is a physiological reason for his habit, but I believe it works against the ability to trust him. Pardon me for not commenting on the level with which we can trust politicians in general regardless of the position of the glasses.

Looking over the classes is a common form of gesture that usually comes across as a negative one. You need to be careful what signals you are sending if you normally wear half glasses. You may be better off having full glass bifocals with the upper half being blank glass. See if you observe people warming up to you more easily.



There can also be a different connotation for looking over the glasses. It can also be interpreted as a flirtatious gesture in some circumstances. The implication is that there is some sort of secret connection going on between the person wearing glasses and the other person.

The gesture has a “come hither” meaning that is easy to spot. The psychological implication is that of removing an artificial barrier for direct eye-to-eye contact. The difference between the first meaning and the second one is in the context of the meeting and the other accompanying facial expressions.

Another pet peeve of mine is people who wear their glasses on top of their head. If you don't need glasses, keep them off your head. Don't wear them up on top where the listener has to observe a precarious position and wonder if the glasses are going to drop off at any second. It is a distraction that is unnecessary. I believe when making eye contact with a person who habitually wears his glasses on top of his head, it undermines the bond created by the eye contact. It is an anomaly that would be better served when it is not used.

If you have a habit of looking over your glasses, whether it be the result of wearing half glasses or the more egregious looking down your nose at some people, try to make a change in your pattern. Fortunately this form of body language is rather easy to change, and you will benefit greatly from doing so.

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.

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