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### Holding Head with Hands

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



One interesting gesture of body language between two people is when a listener holds his or her head up using both hands while at the same time looking directly at the speaker. Earlier in this series [we discussed](#) the bored student in class propping his or her head up with one hand, but what does it mean when a person holds up his or her head with both hands? It is possible for the gesture to indicate extreme fatigue, but more often there is additional information that can be gleaned.

This gesture caught me off guard, because it is not that common, and yet it is important to ascertain the meaning when you see it. I have found two other interpretations that both point to some form of admiration going on.

The first one, which I found in a body language book years ago (and cannot recall the specific reference), is that the person making this gesture is expressing admiration for the speaker on the receiving end. I found this explanation to be plausible, because the person is looking intently at the speaker with a pleasant look on her face, as in the accompanying image. The connotation is intense interest and pleasure. Recently I came upon the opposite interpretation.

According to the [Karen Lehnardt](#), The “face platter” gesture where a person rests his or her face on top of the hands is sometimes used in dating. The connotation is that the face is placed as if it were on a platter for the other person to admire. The hands become like a frame for the facial features.

This gesture is not often seen, but when it is, there is a very strong signal being sent that warrants further investigation that includes the facial expression and the vocal context of the conversation. I buy into the notion that it is an expression of admiration, but it is up to you who is admiring whom. In fact, there is no reason why both mechanisms couldn’t be in play at the same time. Make a mental note when you see this gesture, especially if you are on the giving or receiving end, and do some investigating, by observing the full set of facial expressions, to illuminate what is really going on.

*This is a part in a series of articles on “Body Language.” The entire series can be viewed on <https://www.leadergrow.com/articles/categories/35-body-language> or on this blog.*

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