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The Forehead

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



The forehead is an interesting area of body language. This area of the body is not as expressive as the eyes or mouth, and yet knowing how to interpret certain signals can be very helpful when you are trying to piece together a cluster of gestures into a strong signal.

A wrinkled forehead is always seen in conjunction with raised eyebrows. If you try to wrinkle your forehead without raising your eyebrows, you will see it is difficult or impossible to do. The normal interpretation of wrinkled forehead is surprise or skepticism. It is physically possible to wrinkle only one side of the forehead, but it takes so much effort that you rarely see that gesture. However, just as it is possible to lift one eyebrow more than the other, so too is it possible to have more wrinkles on one side of the face.

To catch the proper interpretation of a raised forehead, look at the mouth. If the mouth is wide open in the shape of an “O” then you can be sure the forehead is signaling surprise. If the lips are pursed or clenched, then the forehead is projecting skepticism or anger.

Hitting the forehead with open palm usually is a sign of exasperation, normally with one’s self. The gesture means “how stupid of me,” or “how could I have missed that before?” This gesture is the subtle form of banging your head against the wall to knock some sense into it.

The forehead is often the first visible area of the body that sweats when a person is overwrought, worried, or otherwise overheated. In negotiations, I used to watch my opponent for tiny beads of sweat on the forehead. It was one indication the other party was under stress and ready to make a concession.

Some hair styles for both women and men obscure the forehead from view. If a person’s bangs hang down to the tops of the eyebrows, you are not going to read forehead signals. You can infer a raised forehead when the bottom of the bangs is lowered into the region of the pupils.

Touching the forehead with the tips of the fingers can have two different meanings depending on the position of the hand. If the hand is straight and the index finger

touches the forehead, it is a greeting sign, like a salute. If the first three fingers touch the forehead at the same time, it means the person is in deep thought. This gesture is often accompanied by closed eyes in an attempt to shut out distracting sights.

Rubbing of the forehead or temples is a sign of a person in deep thought. Generally the person's thumb will be planted on one side of the forehead and the other fingers will slide back and forth in a linear or circular pattern. This person wants to be left alone to work on his or her problem.

The forehead is but one of the countless signals in body language. The important skill is to be able to piece together a mosaic of the many different parts of the face and body to come up with an accurate way to figure out the true meaning. The more you can practice this skill the more adept you will be at being able to read others accurately.

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.

*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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