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The Nose

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Unless your name is Pinocchio, your nose does not contain a lot of body language information by itself, but when we interact with our nose, how we do it can mean a lot of different things.

Of course, the most obvious body language with the nose is when we pinch it between our thumb and index finger. This gesture is always done in response to some situation or action, and it means “this stinks.”

According to [M. Farouk Radwan](#), touching the nose is often a sign of a person having a negative reaction or feeling. It is often done without the person even being aware of it, since the gesture is done subconsciously.

When a person touches his or her nose while making a response to a question, it is usually a sign that the person is exaggerating or lying. Lawyers in the court room are quick to pick up on this signal if they see someone on the witness stand touch his nose while answering a specific question.

I never realized the connection myself until I once viewed a video tape of myself giving a presentation. All of a sudden, I was touching my nose as I answered a question from a participant.

Looking objectively at my response, while I was not telling a lie, I was not totally transparent with my answer either. There was another aspect that I could have revealed but chose to withhold in order to avoid going off on a tangent. I was pressed for time.

The curious thing is that I had no recollection of touching my nose at all. It was only when I reviewed the video that I saw myself making the gesture. Even though I gave myself a pass on truncating my reply because of the time constraint, my body knew there was more to the story.

As a general rule, only a small fraction of the body language signals we make are done consciously. That is why it is difficult to conceal emotions. Other people can see the small gestures that we are not conscious of making. Of course, most people are not well schooled on the various meanings of gestures.

That is why this series of articles can be a big benefit to you. The more you know, the more accurately you can interpret the signals other people make and the more you can be conscious of your own signals.

Sometimes you will encounter a person showing flared nostrils. This is an obvious gesture of displeasure. Physiologically, the person is trying to increase the air flow into the lungs. He may be preparing for either fight or flight.

Wrinkling of the nose is another gesture that signifies a negative reaction. It may be that what was just said does not pass the smell test, or it may be your reaction upon viewing your child's poor report card. The implication is "this stinks."

If you do not have a cold, sniffing is another nose gesture that has a negative connotation. You may be trying to "sniff out the truth," or you may be on a fishing expedition to see what the other person knows.

It is dangerous to ascribe meaning to a single gesture of the nose. The mucus membranes inside the nostrils are highly sensitive, and there is no way you will be able to feel what is going on inside of another person's nose. The best way to interpret meaning from gestures that include the nose is to look for patterns or clusters of different signals that all point in one direction.

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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