

Body Language 30

False Signals

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Throughout this series on body language, I have stressed that the ability to read signals accurately is both an art and a science. You can be educated to pick up the various clues, but there can be a false signal or one that is easy to misinterpret.

You need to be alert that interpreting body language is not 100% accurate. The best way to guard against incorrect interpretations is to look for clusters where different BL signals are all pointing toward one thing. Lacking a cluster, it becomes a game of probabilities.

What we have not covered is when an individual intentionally tries to put off the scent by sending weak or even conflicting signals. If a set of information appears to be incongruent with what your gut is telling you, be suspicious and do some additional detective work.

For example, in a negotiation situation, if your opponent is pacing back and forth while talking and also rubbing his hands while exhibiting a high blinking rate, you would normally assume the individual was nervous and therefore somewhat vulnerable.

What if actually the person was well schooled in body language and wanted to appear nervous in order to lure you into a trap or to extract some information you would not normally share. Actually, he was supremely confident in his ultimate victory but wanted you to think he was insecure.

That kind of play acting can sometimes be observed at car dealers. Skilled horse traders are not shy about sending an opposite signal to gain an advantage. You need to be aware of the ploy. Actually, when you catch a dealer using a common negotiating ploy and call him out on it, the results can be quite amusing. For example, you might say, "Oh you're not going to play the "good guy - bad guy" game with me, are you? I never fall for that tired old ploy." Now, all of a sudden you have the upper hand.

There are other situations where the body language you observe in another person might not be indicative of what that person is feeling toward you. A typical example is when you are talking with someone and she is very short with you. She appears to be

angry or upset, yet you cannot think of anything between you that might be upsetting her.

It could be that she just had a falling out with one of her superiors and is still feeling the sting when she is interfacing with you. It is common for body language from one conversation to spill or bleed over into a subsequent conversation with a different person.

Another common situation is when you want to chat with a person about something serious, but the other person is acting hurried or distracted in some way. The body language you observe may have little to do with you and much more to do with the source of the distraction.

If she needs to get the budget revision completed in the next 30 minutes, she is not going to emote a lot of patience if you want to analyze a verbal altercation that happened in the break room yesterday.

You can accurately decode that she does not want to talk with you, but it has little to do with you and everything to do with her other responsibilities.

If a person frequently acts in ways that are different from what might be expected, it can become a trust withdrawal. You need to bring up the matter in a constructive and respectful way to find out what is going on.

In all these cases, if what you observe does not make sense based upon what you know, chances are you don't know the full story. Back off and wait for a better time to approach the other person. At the very least offer some way for the other person to share the disconnect. Say something like, "It looks like you are in a bind here, maybe it would be better if we chat about my situation at a better time."

False body language signals are at least annoying and are potentially damaging for a relationship. When you encounter them, try to get to the bottom of what is causing the person to act out.

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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