

Body Language 35

Head Tilting

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



A slight tilting of the head is a really interesting bit of body language. I will share my own interpretation first, and then I will describe some useful insight provided by body language expert, Bill Acheson, in his excellent DVD on [“Advanced Body Language.”](#)

I view a slight head tilt as a sign of high interest on the part of the person doing the tilting. I liken it to a situation many of us have experienced at a pet store.

You walk in and see a pen with 6 puppies in it. They are all jumping up on the fence and yipping to have you pick them up. Then you see the slight head tilt of one of those puppies who seems to be saying, “Pick me! You are the most important person in my world right now.”

If you are going home with a puppy that day, it will be the one with the tilted head. You may not even be conscious of how you made the selection, but it was unavoidable.

I believe the same feeling can be generated in human beings. I once met a young man (22) who had the ability to model the gesture instinctively. He was able to establish a feeling of trust within me toward him even before we shook hands. It was a powerful moment that I will always remember.

Very few people I have met in my life have the ability that young man had. When we finally did shake hands a second later, I did not say, “Nice to meet you.” Instead my first spoken words to him were, “Congratulations! You are going to be a very wealthy man.”

In Bill Acheson’s program, he stresses that head tilting is seen to be a sign of good listening, and it is perceived consciously more by woman than men. He recounts some research he performed at University of Pittsburgh in the year 2000. He separated the

men and women and showed each person two pictures of the same woman, one with her head erect and one with her head tilted.

Their research question was, “Which one is the better listener?” Seventy one percent of the females responded within three seconds that the tilted head person was the better listener. When asked why, they were able to identify, “because her head is tilted.” They saw it consciously.

Of the men, many of them puzzled over the two pictures for up to 12 seconds before making a response. Finally, about three quarters of them said, “Dude, that’s the same person, so they would listen the same.”

Tilting the head can also be a means of showing mental activity. We can observe students with a slight tilt of the head when they are pondering a concept just explained in class. Excellent teachers pick up on the body language and make sure to inquire if there is a question. Tilting of the head can also indicate that a person is puzzling over something or working on a problem.

Pay attention to the way people hold their head when interfacing with you. When you see someone with a slight tilt while listening to you, note the mental reaction you have to that person. It is a really powerful signal.

One word of caution here. As is the case with all body language, if you are making the gesture, keep it genuine. If you physically try to tilt your head, you are likely overdoing it, and the result will be not what you wanted. Insincere or put-on gestures often send the opposite message from what was intended.

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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