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Animals

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Because we are verbal creatures, it is sometimes hard to remember how much we communicate with each other through body language.

When we observe how well animals communicate with little or no ability to communicate through words and tone of voice, we can be aware of the tremendous advantage we have.

In the attached picture, we see a mature dog and kitty. Often these two species do not get along so amicably, but here we can read in a lot of what is going on by their body language.

The kitty is alert, feels secure, and is generally happy. Somehow the position of the kitty's ears and paws speak out loudly to me. The animal seems to be saying, "I am here with my buddy Rex, and he is taking care of me. Even though he is ten times larger than me and could actually eat me, I am not afraid."

Just to amplify the contrast, consider how difficult it would be to convey trust with a being that is ten times your size (think the size of an elephant).

The exception, of course, is babies. They can convey total trust simply because of their dependency. I believe it is that unconditional trust that is the foundation of the love and affection we feel for our children.

The face of the dog is one of pride. I get that mostly from the erect head, the lowered jaw, and the shape of the ears. To me, the eyes show caring and love. He has his little friend and is feeling good about their relationship, at least at the moment of the picture. If you were to toss a live rat in the picture, things would probably change quickly.

The dog is not telling me those things verbally or even making any noise, but the body language says it for him.

Imagine if we were as expert at making our feelings known as our pets are. Actually I think we are, but most of it is subconscious. Granted, we do not have the ability to

change the shape of our ears, but we do control their color based on our emotions. A highly emotional state will cause the ears to flush for most people.

That is why the study of body language is so fascinating to me. I have been studying the topic for over 40 years, and I am still learning new things every day.

One thing that comes through loud and clear is that all body language is situational. You cannot assume literal meaning from a single data point of body language. You can only start to form a hypothesis.

To improve the accuracy of your reading, it is necessary to verify your suspicions in a number of ways.

First, look for clusters. If several body language signals point to the same feeling, then your accuracy of reading it correctly goes up geometrically.

Second, make sure to factor in cultural differences, Many gestures are culture specific, and the meaning of a signal in one part of the world can be the exact opposite meaning somewhere else on the planet.

Third, seek to verify your hypothesis by considering what is going on around the body language you observe.

Fourth, ask open ended questions of the person. If the dialog mirrors the body language signal, you are probably close to the true meaning. If the words and body language are opposed, then further verification is needed.

In the future, notice how much animals are able to convey their emotions, even though they don't speak much, or at all. See if you can emulate your pets by showing your emotions in a more conscious manner.

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.

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