

## Body Language 69

### Worried

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Did you ever stop and think how you can tell if a person is worried by his or her body language? Actually, there are several gestures that are indicative of a person who is anxious or worried.

A worried person will often wring his hands together. Usually the person is not even aware he is doing it, but when you see that kind of nervous rubbing the palms together, you should look for more clues to see if the person is truly worried.

Often a worried person will bite the side of one lower lip. A person biting the center of the lower lip is usually trying to keep from speaking, but if she is biting the side of her lip, it normally means worry. She may also bite a finger as shown in the attached picture.

See if you observe a “far away” look in the eyes. A worried person is thinking thoughts of bad things that could happen, so the focus on current activities or people is often not very strong. Also, watch the eyebrows to see if they are pulled to the center or slightly raised. Look for the appearance of two vertical lines above the bridge of the nose.

A worried person will often fidget and shift weight a lot while sitting. It is a nervous habit that takes hold involuntarily. He may massage his temples as if he is trying to focus his thoughts on a problem. He may fold his hands as if in prayer or even put his palms together and touch his lips with the tips of his fingers. All these gestures are meant to help the person focus on the problem at hand.

When you see a person exhibiting a cluster of these gestures, you can be pretty sure he or she is worried about something. You may be able to help by asking an open ended question or two. Just recognize that the person may not want to verbalize the root cause of her anxiety. In that case, the best you can do is be supportive of the person and let her know you are there for her when she wants to talk about it.

In a work setting, there are numerous triggers that can cause anxiety. The most significant trigger is worry that the person’s reputation has been damaged, which can cause all kinds of stress at work. The person may even be anxious about losing her employment.

If she is agreeable to dialog about her feelings, try to uncover the source of her anxiety. She may feel that her boss has soured on her, or it might be an interpersonal issue with another worker. It could be that she is way behind on an important project or feels she might be in danger of losing a customer.

One particularly tricky situation is when a person is anxious but has no idea why. It is just a general uneasiness that is distracting to the person. Again, if the person will chat about it, you may be able to help draw out the source. That is what friends and associates are for.

We all experience worry at certain points in our professional and personal lives. If we are aware of the physical signs pointing to this emotion, we can help each other at a critical time. We can also help ourselves by observing our own behavior and be more consious of our emotions so we have the opportunity to take corrective measures sooner.

*This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language" by Bob Whipple "The Trust Ambassador."*