

## Body Language 78

### *Faking Emotions*

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Sometimes people will try to fake or disguise their emotions. I believe the hit rate for doing that successfully is pretty low. There are an infinite number of ways we send signals to other people without uttering any words. We lump it all under the term “Body Language.”

We may think that we can fool others into thinking we are happy when we are actually experiencing another strong emotion. When we do that, we send mixed signals that lower trust and tend to confuse people.

The number of permutations when trying to disguise emotions is so large, we cannot begin to explore a substantial portion in a brief article. I will just mention a few examples here to illustrate my point.

Human beings have a remarkable ability to sniff out conflicting signals. They may not be able to decode what the true emotion is, but they can sense when something is not genuine.

In the attached photo, both men are trying to look pleasant while they are shaking hands. The problem is they are trying too hard. The whole handshake is spooky and not genuine, for a number of reasons.

First of all, the two men are not even facing each other. One is standing at 90 degrees to the other. One man has his hand in his pocket, which is a sign he may have something to hide. The posture of the man on the left is rigid and not consistent with a truly friendly greeting. His smile looks pasted on. The man on the right looks as if he is trying to get away from the other man as fast as he can.

When we meet someone for the first time, there are many layers of information being conveyed, according to body language expert Bill Acheson of the University of Pittsburgh. The layers are time, space, appearance, posture, gesture, facial expression, eye contact, breathing, touch, and smell. Bill says, “There are twelve layers of information and we pick up every single detail at some subconscious level.”

When we try to manipulate one factor by focusing energy on a masking gesture, we are still sending out a huge amount of data on the other factors that will look incongruent.

I suspect you have had the experience of meeting someone where you were thinking, “I don’t trust this individual. I am not sure why, but something is wrong here.” For example, I once met a CEO who made a specific effort to avoid all eye contact while we were shaking hands. It was creepy.

On the other extreme, you have met people in your life that came across as truly authentic in every detail. You have a tendency to naturally bond with those people instantly because you sensed that you could trust them.

I had an experience of going to a meeting where I was very angry at one of the participants. I won’t go into the details of why I was livid, but I tried to hide the fact with a pleasant air and small talk. I am sure that my attempt to hide the truth came across as phony because she had a look of high discomfort throughout the meeting.

The purpose of this article is to remind us all that our true emotions are on display at all times. Try to hide them at your peril. What you are actually doing is lowering the possibility of a trusting relationship.

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