



Understanding People Through The Way They Communicate

Have you ever wondered why someone's words don't always match their body language? Observing the way people communicate, both verbally and nonverbally, can help you to assess what they might be feeling at the present moment. It can also help you to get to the heart of the issue, make someone feel more comfortable, or diffuse a potentially explosive situation. This article provides some tips on recognizing and understanding verbal and nonverbal cues, and using this information to improve communication.

When conversing with someone, there are verbal cues that indicate what their current mood is and/or how they may be feeling about a specific subject or issue. Verbal cues can include, but are not limited to, the tone or pitch of the person's voice, and how fast or slow they speak. The following examines both of these verbal cues:

1. **Tone/pitch of voice.** Listen to the person's tone. Do they sound excited, is their tone devoid of emotion, are they loud or yelling, or do they sound like they normally do? If a person sounds excited, they may have just received good news or had a positive experience. If their tone lacks emotion, they may be tired or depressed. If they are short and abrupt, they may be in a hurry or upset about something. If the person's tone is different from what it normally is, ask questions to get at the root of the issue. For example, if someone sounds sad, and they are normally upbeat, address their tone. Share your concern that they don't sound well and inquire about their current situation.
2. **Talking fast or slow.** Is the person speaking rapidly or slowly? If the person is speaking fast, they may be excited, apprehensive, or scared. If their speech is slow, they may be lacking energy, not sure what to say, or choosing the right words so they don't come across as being offensive. If the person is normally a fast talker, but is speaking slowly, this might be your cue to inquire about the person's mental or physical condition.

When communicating with people, also observe their nonverbal behaviors. The following is a list of some nonverbal cues to look for, especially when the person's words seem to conflict with their body language.

1. **Eye contact.** Is the individual looking you directly in the eyes or avoiding eye contact? Looking into someone's eyes generally reflects honesty and competence. If a person avoids eye contact, they may be nervous, angry, or lying.

2. Posture. Is the person sitting or standing straight/erect or are they slumped? If a person's posture is straight, this is usually a sign that they are confident and ready for action. If the person is slumped, this may indicate that they are exhausted or depressed, lack confidence, or are trying to hide from something.
3. Crossed arms and legs. When people cross their arms or legs, this may indicate that they are closed to communication. However, many people cross their legs when relaxing so it is recommended that you look at more than one nonverbal cue when assessing the individual.
4. Person's body is turned to the side. If an individual is slightly turned away from you, they are probably seeking the first opportunity to exit the conversation. If they face you directly, they are most likely engaged in the conversation and will finish it.
5. How the person is dressed. Although the way a person dresses can express their individuality, it can also speak volumes about how they are feeling. For example, if a person goes to an interview with wrinkled or dirty clothing, their poor hygiene will be noticed and they may be perceived as not truly caring about securing the job. On the other hand, if the person attends the interview well groomed and in professional attire, the attention they gave their appearance will be noticed and they will be perceived as interested in the position.
6. Excessive movement. If you are engaged in a conversation with someone, and they are constantly tapping their fingers or feet, or swinging a leg, this may be an indication that they are nervous or in a hurry.

By listening to a person's words and watching their body language, you will be able to observe whether or not their words and body language are in concert or conflict. If you detect a conflict, ask questions to assess what is occurring with the individual. By asking questions and demonstrating concern, you may be able to help someone feel comfortable or resolve an issue, or diffuse a potentially negative experience or explosive situation.

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If you want to make positive changes in your professional life, and create the job or career you desire and deserve, then working with Executive & Life Coach, Sharon L. Mikrut, is the solution. Although her specialty is in partnering with nonprofit executive directors and managers to maximize their resources in a competitive environment, she is passionate about working with all individuals committed to personal and/or professional growth. Visit her website at <http://www.createitcoaching.org> or Nonprofit Professionals blog at <http://www.createitcoaching.com>, and sign up for her free monthly newsletter that provides information and resources designed to help you manage your nonprofit organization in a more effective and efficient manner. You can also visit her Empowerment blog at <http://www.createitcoaching.net>, and sign up for her free monthly life coaching newsletter.