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BE HONEST AND AUTHENTIC

In the previous section I stressed how important a first impression is. But what if you blow it? What if you trip on a cord as you go to the front of the room? What if you plug in your computer and the image doesn't show up on the projector?

This—and much worse—happens to every presenter at some point. In my career as a presenter and speaker I've had the following things occur:

- ★ No one brought a projector yet my entire presentation consisted of slides.
- ★ No one picked up the handouts from the printer as they said they would.
- ★ The electricity went out in the building just as I started my presentation.
- ★ I looked down to realize I was wearing two completely different shoes (long story).
- ★ My luggage didn't arrive with me on the plane, and I had dressed very casually that day.
- ★ My plane was late, so I arrived an hour late and everyone was waiting for me. I didn't have any time to test out the microphone, set the room up the way I wanted it to be, and so on.
- ★ I walked up to the front of the stage not knowing that I had toilet paper stuck to my shoe.

When things like this happen, undermining your impression of being a leader in control, you have a few choices:

1. Ignore it and hope that no one else sees it/realizes it.
2. Acknowledge whatever is going on and ask for understanding.
3. Acknowledge whatever is going on and make a joke and/or self-effacing comment.

Takeaways

- ★ Try to anticipate what might go wrong and plan and prepare to minimize problems.
- ★ Stuff always happens. Something is likely to go wrong. The true test of your leadership is how you handle it.
- ★ If you establish confidence in others early on, they will be on your side and forgiving.
- ★ Use humor, be authentic and honest, and consider mild self-effacement as a way to get out of a potentially authority-demeaning situation.

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PEOPLE ASSIGN MEANING TO YOUR BODY POSITIONS AND MOVEMENT

In addition to the initial first impression discussed previously, people continue to unconsciously interpret and react to your body positions throughout your whole presentation. Assuming that you want to convey confidence, leadership, authority, passion, and openness, there are certain body positions that you should use and some that you should avoid.

DIRECTION AND ORIENTATION

Face people directly to convey authority and confidence (**Figure 75.1**). Standing at an angle (**Figure 75.2**) says that you and the audience are collaborating.



FIGURE 75.1 Facing full front conveys authority and confidence.



FIGURE 75.2 A 45-degree angle says you are collaborating.

REMOVE BARRIERS

Don't have any barriers between you and the audience—don't use a lectern, and move tables out of the way if possible. People need to see your body in order to trust you (**Figure 75.3** and **Figure 75.4**).



FIGURE 75.3 If people can't see your body, you won't look as confident and they may not trust you.



FIGURE 75.4 Showing your body conveys trust, confidence, and authority.

KEEP YOUR HEAD STRAIGHT

When you are talking one-on-one with someone, tilting your head conveys that you are interested in them or what they are saying, but it can also be a sign of submission. Since you want to convey authority and confidence during your presentation, you should avoid tilting your head (**Figure 75.5** and **Figure 75.6**).



FIGURE 75.5 Tilting your head while presenting is a form of submission.

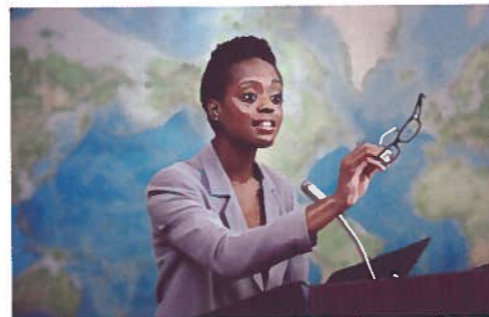


FIGURE 75.6 Keep your head straight to convey confidence and authority.

STAND WITH BALANCED WEIGHT

Standing firmly with your weight evenly balanced on both legs and your head straight says you are sure and confident. Putting weight on only one foot or leaning against something like a table, chair, or lectern undermines your confidence and authority (**Figure 75.7** and **Figure 75.8**).



FIGURE 75.7 Leaning against something undermines your confidence and authority.



FIGURE 75.8 Standing with balanced weight conveys confidence and authority.

DON'T FIDGET

Not too long ago I spoke at a conference with a line-up of great presenters. One man I had been looking forward to hearing got up to speak. He is well-known in his field, but I had never seen him speak. His talk was very good, but I couldn't concentrate on it because throughout the entire talk he did a small movement over and over. He would step forward with one foot and then step back with the other, like a little dance, over and over. It was a form of fidgeting, and it was very distracting.

Fidgeting like this takes many forms. Some people rattle keys in their pockets or tap their feet or fingers. Fidgeting conveys that you are nervous, bored, or impatient.

DEAL WITH NERVOUSNESS

Contrary to myth and legend, people do not fear public speaking more than death. But giving a presentation makes everyone nervous. As Mark Twain once said, "There are two types of speakers, those that are nervous and those that are liars."

Being a little nervous is a good thing. It will keep you alert and make you excited. But being too nervous is a bad thing. Nervousness is contagious. If you are nervous, your audience will be too.

➔ Muscles and emotions form a two-way feedback loop

When you feel certain emotions, your body shows those signs. For example, when you feel sad, your shoulders slump, you don't stand up straight, and your mouth muscles move downward. But did you realize that the opposite is true? If you stand up straight and smile, your mood will improve. Research by Pablo Brinol (2009) shows that when people take postures of confidence, they actually feel more confident.

Before you start your presentation, go to a room nearby (or go out in the hallway or backstage) and work on your body position. Breathe deeply, stand straight, and keep your head straight too. If you take on this confident body posture, you will then feel more confident.

MOVE WITH PURPOSE

Although fidgeting movement is not good, moving with purpose is. Move toward people right before you make an important point, but make sure you are still while you are making the important point.

Moving away signifies a break or a change of topic.

Takeaways

- * Before beginning your presentation, take a minute to be alone, breathe deeply, and stand confidently.
- * Have someone record video of you making a presentation, or video yourself practicing, so you can see what your stance is like and whether you fidget.
- * Practice your talk a lot. This will increase your confidence, which makes it less likely that you will engage in nervous fidgeting.

76 PEOPLE ASSIGN MEANING TO YOUR HAND GESTURES

Everyone “talks” with his hands to some extent. Some people’s hand-talking or gesturing matches their message well. Other people have a tendency to make overly large gestures that can be distracting. Others don’t use their hands much at all. No matter which camp you fall into, it’s important to pay attention to your hand gestures and practice some new ones you might not be used to using.

UNIVERSAL HAND GESTURES

Some hand gestures are universal across all languages, geographies, and cultures.

Using no hand gestures at all conveys a lack of interest, and if your audience can’t see your hands at all, it will be hard for them to trust you.

If you gesture with your hands open and your palms up, you are communicating that you are asking for something from the audience (**Figure 76.1**).



FIGURE 76.1 Hands open with palms up means you are asking for something from the audience.

Hand gestures in which you have your hands open and your palms at a 45-degree angle communicates that you are being honest and open (**Figure 76.2**).

When you open your hands but have your palms facing down, you are communicating that you are certain about what you are talking about (**Figure 76.3**).



FIGURE 76.2 Hands open with palms at a 45-degree angle means you are being honest and open. (Photo by Guthrie Weinschenk)



FIGURE 76.3 Hands open with palms down means you are certain about what you are talking about. (Photo by Guthrie Weinschenk)

If you place your hands at a 90-degree angle with your fingers together, you are communicating that you have confidence in and expertise about what you are saying (**Figure 76.4**).

If your hands are grasped in front of you, you are communicating that you are nervous or tentative, as does touching your face, hair, or neck (**Figure 76.5** and **Figure 76.6**).

If you are standing and have your hands on your hips, you are communicating aggressiveness. There are times when this might be appropriate (for example, in a negotiation), but think twice before using it during a presentation (**Figure 76.7**).



FIGURE 76.4 Hands at a 90-degree angle with fingers together means you have confidence in and expertise about what you are saying. (Photo by Guthrie Weinschenk)



FIGURE 76.5 Touching your face, hair, or neck makes you look nervous or tentative.



FIGURE 76.6 Hands grasped in front of you makes you look nervous or tentative.



FIGURE 76.7 Hands on your hips is usually too aggressive a stance for a presentation.

Using hand gestures that are larger than the outlines of your body communicates a large idea or concept. Don't make all your hand gestures large, however, or you will communicate that you are chaotic or out of control (**Figure 76.8**).



FIGURE 76.8 Hand gestures that go beyond your body indicate that an idea is large. If all your hand gestures are this big, you might appear out of control.



A great book on body language

My favorite book on body language is *The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help—or Hurt—How You Lead* by Carol Kinsey Goman (Jossey Bass, 2011).

HAND GESTURES CAN HAVE CULTURAL MEANINGS

A few years ago I was a speaker at a conference in Lisbon, Portugal. It was my first time in Portugal, and I became instantly enamored of the special custard pastries that Lisbon and Portugal are known for. One morning I went into a bakery and ordered two of the pastries. I did so by holding up two fingers, similar to the “victory” or “peace” gesture in the United States. The person behind the counter proceeded to put three pastries in a box. I later learned that the gesture for two would have been to raise my thumb and index finger. Even though my thumb wasn’t showing, the person behind the counter thought I was signaling for three.

I was lucky that I didn’t get into more trouble than an extra pastry. Many hand gestures are not universal. Before speaking in a country or to a culture that you are not familiar with, do some research to find out which gestures in your presentation might be misunderstood, not understood at all, or offensive.

Takeaways

- * Have someone record video of you making a presentation, or video yourself practicing, so you can see what your hand gestures are like.
- * If you are speaking outside of your culture, check your hand gestures to make sure they convey what you think they do.
- * Try adding one hand gesture on purpose.

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PEOPLE ASSIGN MEANING TO YOUR TONE OF VOICE

If you’ve ever eavesdropped on a conversation in a country where you did not speak the language, you might have been surprised to find yourself following along and picking up the feeling of the conversation even though you didn’t understand any of the words or literal meaning.

This is an entire field of research, and it’s called paralinguistics. It refers to vocal communication that is separate from the words that are spoken.

Think about this for a minute. You can say, “Sure, I’ll go with you to the store” in many different ways. You can say it with a lot of enthusiasm, with sarcasm, or with boredom. The way you say the sentence conveys as much meaning—or more—as the words themselves.

GREAT PRESENTERS MODULATE

If you spend some time listening to great speakers give presentations, you will hear that they modulate their voice. They vary the pitch and the volume of their voice, based on the meaning. If you talk at the same pitch and volume all of the time, your presentation will sound boring and you will appear to lack emotion or passion for your topic. Match your paralinguistics to your message. If you are excited or passionate about an idea, convey that passion with your paralinguistics.

GREAT PRESENTERS CAN BE HEARD

It’s important to speak loudly enough. If you are too soft-spoken, you will convey timidity or nervousness.

GREAT PRESENTERS ARTICULATE

Make sure that you are pronouncing all of your words. Watch out especially for the endings of words and the endings of sentences; these are the places that presenters tend to cut off. Articulating well conveys confidence and authority.

GREAT PRESENTERS PAUSE

One of the biggest differences between a poor or mediocre presenter and a great presenter is the use of pauses. If you get nervous, you will tend to talk faster and faster with few pauses. Experienced presenters pause a lot during their presentations. They pause

before and after they make an important statement. They pause when they go from one topic to another. Your silence can be as important as your words.

★ The sociometer

Alex Pentland from MIT designed the sociometer, a small gadget you wear that measures nonverbal components of speech. The sociometer records and predicts the effectiveness of a person's communication. His work is summarized in his book *Honest Signals* (The MIT Press, 2010).

Takeaways

- * Have someone record the audio of your presentation, or record yourself while you are practicing. Listen for the various paralinguistics, and see what you should and could adjust.
- * Changing your paralinguistics can take a lot of work. Pick one thing you want to change, and practice over and over until it is automatic.
- * Consider working with a voice coach to evaluate and improve your paralinguistics. You want someone who specializes in coaching for paralinguistics in presentations.

78 PEOPLE ASSIGN MEANING TO YOUR FACE AND EYE MOVEMENTS

In the chapter "How People Listen and See," there is a section on the fusiform face area, or FFA, which is a special part of the brain that pays attention to faces. Thanks to the FFA, your audience will also be unconsciously looking at and paying attention to your face. If you are speaking in a large auditorium, then your audience may not be able to see your face or eyes very well. But if you are speaking or presenting to a smaller group, where people can see and "read" your face, then it is important that you think about what they will see and about how your face and eye movements may affect your message.

UNCONSCIOUS FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Have you ever watched a newscaster on TV closely? They always have a slight smile, even when they are announcing bad or sad news. This is something that does not come naturally, and it has to be practiced until it is somewhat automatic.

Try this exercise:

1. Prepare a few sentences from one of your presentations.
2. Memorize the words so you don't have to look at anything to say the few sentences.
3. Say the sentences in front of a mirror as though you are giving your talk.

Unless you were telling a funny story, chances are that your expression in the mirror was quite somber.

It's easy to forget that our faces show many expressions and that we might not be aware of them. When you are giving a presentation, you might be thinking hard and therefore tend to frown; or perhaps you get nervous, forget what comes next, and start to look panicked. Your audience will react to your facial expressions.

MANY FACIAL EXPRESSIONS ARE UNIVERSAL

Paul Ekman has been studying emotions in different geographies and cultures for many years. He has identified seven emotions that seem to be universal: joy, sadness, anger, contempt, surprise, disgust, and fear. If you are feeling any of these emotions, it may be hard to hide them, and your audience might become aware of your feelings. If you are

speaking to a group that is culturally like you, then there may be even more than these seven that could be communicated and understood.

Some facial expressions and eye movements to watch out for are:

- ★ **Frequent blinking.** Blinking a lot can be a sign of nervousness and can communicate that you are uncomfortable. It can also be interpreted as being attracted to someone.
- ★ **Direct eye gaze.** When you look directly at someone during a conversation, you convey that you are interested and paying attention. This is why looking at your audience is so important. Staring for too long at one person, however, indicates that you are threatening them.
- ★ **Frequent eye shifting.** When you constantly move your eyes, you communicate that you are nervous or lying.
- ★ **Chewing on your bottom lip or biting your lips.** This conveys worry, insecurity, and fear.

Takeaways

- * There is always some kind of expression on your face. Take some time to practice while looking in the mirror so you can see what kinds of facial expressions you are using.
- * Look at your audience directly. Spend 2 to 3 seconds looking at one person, then move to another person, and so on for your whole presentation. This says you are interested but not threatening. It also prevents you from shifting your eyes side to side a lot (which makes you appear to be nervous or lying).

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PEOPLE IMITATE YOUR EMOTIONS AND FEEL YOUR FEELINGS

Have you ever watched someone watching a movie or a TV show? Or watched someone listening to a friend tell a story? If you do, you will see that the person who is watching mirrors the expressions and even body language of the person they are listening to.

People imitate what they see. If you are smiling, they will tend to smile; if you are energetic yet relaxed, then your audience will tend to be energetic and relaxed too. Which means YOU have to make sure you are rested, prepared, relaxed, and passionate about your topic. When you are, those feelings are communicated through your words, tone of voice, and body language and are picked up and felt by your audience.

MIRROR NEURONS FIRING

The front of the brain contains an area called the premotor cortex (motor, as in movement). This is not the part of the brain that actually sends out the signals that make you move—that part of the brain is the primary motor cortex. The premotor cortex makes *plans* to move.

Let's say you're holding an ice cream cone. You notice that the ice cream is dripping, and you think that maybe you should lick off the dripping part before it lands on your shirt. If you were hooked up to an fMRI machine, you would first see the premotor cortex light up while you're thinking about licking the dripping cone, and then you would see the primary motor cortex light up as you move your arm. Now here comes the interesting part. Let's say it's not you that has the dripping ice cream cone—it's your friend. You are watching your friend's cone start to drip. If you watch your friend lift his or her arm and lick the dripping cone, a subset of the same neurons also fire in your premotor cortex. Just watching other people take an action causes some of the same neurons to fire as actually taking the action yourself. This subset of neurons has been dubbed *mirror neurons*.



Mirror neurons are the starting point of empathy

The latest theory is that mirror neurons are also the way we empathize with others. We are literally experiencing what others are experiencing through these mirror neurons, and that allows us to deeply understand how another person feels.

V.S. Ramachandran is one of the leading researchers on mirror neurons. I recommend that you watch this TED talk, in which he describes his research, at <http://bit.ly/aaiXba>



Mimicking other people's body language makes them like you more

Watch two people talking. If you observe them closely, you will see that over time the two people start to imitate each other's body language. If one leans in, the other leans in. If one touches his face, the other person touches her face.

Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh (1999) had people sit down and talk with someone (a "confederate" who was actually part of the experiment, but the participants didn't know that). The confederates would vary their gestures and movements in a planned way. Some confederates were told to smile a lot, others to touch their faces, and others to jiggle their feet. The participants in the study would start to (unconsciously) imitate their confederates. Some behaviors increased more than others: Face-touching increased by 20 percent, but foot-jiggling increased by 50 percent.

In another experiment, Chartrand and Bargh had two groups. In one group, the confederate imitated the participant's movements, and in the second group the confederate did not imitate the participant. After the conversation, the participants were asked how much they liked the confederate and how well they thought the interaction had gone. The group where the confederate had imitated the participant gave the confederate and the interaction higher ratings than did the group where the confederate had not imitated the participant.

PEOPLE RESPOND TO PASSION

The most frequent comment I have received throughout my career is, "You are so passionate about your topic!" One of the most important emotions you can convey to your audience is passion. People like to watch and listen to someone who is animated and excited about what they are talking about. If your topic does get you excited, don't hold back. Show how you feel. That feeling will be contagious. If you aren't excited about what you are talking about, then reconsider the topic or your approach to it. You need to find an angle on the topic at hand that will get you excited.

Takeaways

- * Feelings and emotions are contagious. However you are feeling, that information is communicated to your audience.
- * Take time before you start your presentation to center yourself, rev yourself up, relax yourself, or whatever else you need to do in order to feel good and to feel ready.
- * Make sure you are excited and passionate about your topic and message.

You've probably heard the phrases "Clothes make the man" and "Dress for success." These are two sayings that actually have research to back them up.

Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton (1955) had an experimenter in a city cross the street against the traffic. When he was dressed in a suit, three-and-a-half times as many people followed him as when he was wearing a work shirt and trousers. Business suits are a form of authority clothing.

In a study by Bickman (1974), the experimenter stopped a person on the street, pointed to an accomplice 50 feet away, and said, "You see that guy over there by the meter? He's overparked but doesn't have any change. Give him a dime!" The experimenter would then leave. The "guy over there" was part of the experiment. When the experimenter was wearing a uniform (for example, a guard uniform), most people complied with the instruction to give the other person money for the parking meter. When he was dressed in regular street clothes, compliance was less than 50 percent.

DRESS FOR SIMILARITY OR FOR AUTHORITY?

Clothes matter when it comes to authority. People react automatically and unconsciously to the clothes you are wearing.

- ★ If your goal is to be seen as being similar to the audience, then take your cue from your audience and dress similarly. If, however, you want to raise your authority a level, then dress one notch above your audience. If you dress too formally compared with your audience, you will be seen as stuffy and "not one of us."
- ★ If you go the casual route, make sure you know what you are doing. I was at a training session with other presenters recently and we got on the topic of clothing. One of the presenters said that he purposely wears jeans when he is presenting to certain audiences in order to appear more similar to them. One of the other people in the room asked, "You mean like the jeans you have on today?"

"Exactly," he replied.

"But you are speaking to young affluent professionals who wear certain kinds of jeans. Your jeans are regular, no-name-brand jeans. To someone who knows jeans, you aren't dressed like them at all."

Takeaways

- * If you want to appear similar to your audience, then dress like your audience, but make sure you really know what that means.
- * If you want to gain authority, dress one notch above your audience.
- * If you can legitimately wear a uniform (for example, you are a doctor or in the military), then wearing the uniform when you present will add authority.

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PEOPLE LISTEN TO AND ARE PERSUADED BY THOSE SIMILAR TO/ATTRACTIVE TO THEM

People are more likely to listen to and be persuaded by you if they find you attractive, believe you are similar to them, or both. (In case you think that some people might be affected in this way, but not you—everyone is affected by the factors of attractiveness and similarity.)

YOU HAVE THREE BRAINS, NOT ONE

In my book *Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click?*, I write about unconscious mental processing and the new brain, the mid/emotional brain, and the old brain.

The old brains of your audience will be evaluating whether or not you are attractive. If they decide you are attractive, then you will be able to initially grab the audience's attention—and possibly hold it (if you are really attractive!). This decision about your attractiveness will be based on the geometry and symmetry of your face, what you are wearing, and various “programmed” as well as learned factors about what attractive means.

What's important to remember is that your audience is using all three brains in responding to you. Unconsciously, the mid-brains of your audience are deciding whether to trust you and be friends with you—they are unconsciously evaluating whether you are similar to them. Unconsciously, the old brains of your audience are deciding whether you are a possible partner for sex and whether the environment is safe enough to stay in the room.

SIMILAR IS BETTER

Similarity builds rapport. If people feel that you are like them, then they will tend to like and trust you more. People find it easier to like those they are similar to or those they perceive as sharing their background or values. It can even boil down to clothes—people like people who are dressed similarly to them.

VOTE FOR THE MOST ATTRACTIVE PERSON?

Efran and Patterson (1974) analyzed elections in Canada and found that attractive candidates received more than 2.5 times as many votes, despite the fact that 73 percent of voters said that attractiveness did not influence their vote. Robert Cialdini (2007) reports on the large body of research that shows that people who are physically attractive are perceived to be smarter, more capable, and more intelligent.