

## **EFFECTIVE NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Non-verbal communication is a vital part of understanding and communication. Some estimates suggest that speech only makes up about 20 to 30% of communication. The rest of the information is conveyed non-verbally, by tone of voice, facial expressions, eye-contact, gestures, how we stand, and so on.

### **Body Language or Body Movements (Kinesics)**

Body movements can be used to reinforce or emphasise what a person is saying and also offer information about the emotions and attitudes of a person. However, it is also possible for body movements to conflict with what is said. Be aware that whilst some gestures are internationally recognised, others may need to be interpreted in their cultural context.

There are several different categories of body movement, these include:

**Emblems - Gestures that serve the same function as a word.** For example, the signals that mean 'OK', 'Come here!', or the hand movement used when hitch-hiking.

**Illustrators - Gestures which accompany words to illustrate a verbal message.** For example, the common circular hand movement which accompanies the phrase 'over and over again', or nodding the head in a particular direction when saying 'over there'.

**Regulators - Gestures used to give feedback when conversing.** Examples include head nods, short sounds such as 'uh-huh', 'mm-mm', and expressions of interest or boredom. Regulators allow the other person to adapt his or her speech to reflect the level of interest or agreement.

**Adaptors - are non-verbal behaviours which either satisfy some physical need.** Include such actions as scratching or adjusting uncomfortable glasses, or represent a psychological need such as biting fingernails when nervous.

**Posture - can reflect emotions, attitudes and intentions.** Two forms of posture have been identified, 'open' and 'closed', which may reflect an individual's degree of confidence, status or receptivity to another person.

**Mirroring.** Notice the way a loving couple relate to each other. For example, if one partner drapes an arm over the back of a chair this might be replicated in the other person's position. If one partner frowns, it could be reflected in the other partner's facial expression. This 'mirroring' indicates interest and approval between people.

### **Closeness and Personal Space (Proxemics)**

Every culture has different levels of physical closeness appropriate to different types of relationship, and individuals learn these distances from the society in which they grew

up. In today's multicultural society, it is important to consider the range of non-verbal codes as expressed in different ethnic groups. When someone violates an '*appropriate*' distance, people may feel uncomfortable or defensive. Their actions may well be open to misinterpretation.

There are four distances categories that are associated with the four main types of relationship - intimate, personal, social and public.

**Intimate:** If you use it with a person with whom you do not have a close relationship can be extremely disturbing.

**Personal:** The most appropriate for people holding a conversation. At this distance it is easy to see the other person's expressions and eye movements, as well as their overall body language. Handshaking can occur within the bounds of personal distance.

**Social:** This is the *normal* distance for impersonal business, for example working together in the same room or during social gatherings. Speech needs to be louder and eye contact remains essential to communication.

**Public:** Teachers and public speakers address groups at a public distance. Subtle facial expressions are lost at this distance, so clear hand gestures are often used as a substitute. Larger head movements are also typical of an experienced public speaker who is aware of changes in the way body language is perceived at longer distances.

## **Vocal Production**

The following three core elements of vocal production need to be understood for anyone wishing to become an effective speaker:

**Volume** - to be heard.

Some people have naturally soft voices and physically cannot bellow. Additionally, if the voice is raised too much, tonal quality is lost. Instead of raising the voice it should be 'projected out'. Support the voice with lots of breath - the further you want to project the voice out, the more breath you need.

**Clarity** - to be understood.

Some people tend to speak through clenched teeth and with little movement of their lips. It is this inability to open mouths and failure to make speech sounds with precision that is the root cause of inaudibility. The sound is locked into the mouth and not let out. To have good articulation it is important to unclench the jaw, open the mouth and give full benefit to each sound you make, paying particular attention to the ends of words. This will also help your audience as a certain amount of lip-reading will be possible.

**Variety** - to add interest.

To make speech effective and interesting, certain techniques can be applied. However, it is important not to sound false or as if you are giving a performance. Whilst words convey meaning, how they are said reflects feelings and emotions.