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### **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIVE INTELLIGENCE AND WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION**

"A little tact and wise management may often evade resistance,  
and carry a point, where direct force might be in vain."

Author Unknown

By: Kendall Zoller & Bob Harrison

We have all probably had them. One of those days at work where everything seems to go according to plan. "Ah" we say, "this is why I went into this profession. Customers were responsive; I was on the mark. Even our associate's meeting went well." Wouldn't it be great if we could "flip the switch" and make those days happen as a norm, rather than as an exception? What makes one of "those days" anyway? How is it different than some others, where the sledding is tough, co-workers might not be on the same wavelength and things just don't seem right?

How can we engage and sustain the influence and rapport we feel when we are on top of our game? To answer these and other questions we enter into nonverbal communicative intelligence to discover the key to making a difference in every setting where communication is important.

Persons with influence know the power of relationship and rapport. They know authority and direct management can

often have an adverse effect, especially where cooperation or collaboration is a goal. Reflect back that great day, the one that makes you smile. The vivid images of the successful sale, the energizing meeting or that career achievement is probably etched in your memory.

From year to year, each meeting and peer interaction is unique. They all develop their own personalities, and each can sway from "pain to pleasure" from day to day in seemingly mysterious ways. Rather than relying on chance or whim, though, those who succeed can rely on specific and deliberate strategies to enhance the consistency of their communications in deep and very profound ways.

### **Nonverbal Communicative Intelligence - More Than Body Language**

You have read the term, nonverbal communicative intelligence, twice thus far and may be wondering what it is. Welcome to an old friend in a new and meaningful frame. We are not talking simply of body language, but rather, something larger and more dynamic.

Nonverbal communicative intelligence (NCI) is a set of real skills to use in real time, and with deliberate intent. NCI can be thought of as capacity to interact with the environment through the use of a set of specific skills. NCI includes the ability to be systematic in your use of gesture, voice, breathing and other nonverbal signals. One skilled in NCI has an ability to notice and react to the nonverbal signals in formal and informal settings. They can forecast with some certainty the behavior of others based on the influence of their own nonverbal patterns.

Those with well-developed NCI quickly and easily establish rapport with co-workers and clients. They are also able to make conscious choices about when to use specific patterns for an intended outcome in the perceptions of others. What this means is: those who can implement nonverbal patterns with deliberate intent can enhance and sustain communication and rapport.

Nonverbal communicative intelligence emerged from research with teachers in five countries across the globe. The teacher's nonverbal patterns were identified and analyzed both within their culture and patterns all held in common. Several nonverbal patterns were found in all instances; all with very similar responses from students answer. Interestingly, the impact on students was also consistent in each instance. These findings were consistent with previous efforts to identify how movement, gesture and voice all combine to form "communication" and give us a baseline to extend the findings into everyday life. Those skilled at the conscious use of NCI will find the perceptions of others are impacted, and their responses will also be quite similar.

### **Five Patterns You Can Use**

Below are five effective nonverbal patterns you can use for specific purposes to enhance rapport and credibility in any setting. What you will discover is these skills allow you to focus more time and energy on the content of your message and less energy on managing the unpredictability of the response.

Each skill is listed with a brief explanation, followed by an exercise for you to practice the skill. As

you incorporate them into your speaking, the encouragement is to "be kind" to yourself. Consider adopting one or two skills at a time. Practice and refine them for about a week. Once those skills are mastered, move on to the next.

### **1. Choose Voice -**

We all have a range of voice tone and rhythm we use at work and in everyday life. Our voice might be perceived as commanding or comforting. In given circumstances, it could change dramatically as you deal with the stress of the unexpected. By becoming more familiar with our own range of voice patterns, you can consciously and deliberately broaden it to influence others in the way you intend. You may already recognize how you reflexively respond to the various voices around you. Some you might tend to ignore; others prompt your immediate attention. Still others create a sense of comfort and relationship in your mind. Being conscious of how you might use your own voice to enhance effect is a valuable commodity whenever you need

Think of a continuum line across this paper from left to right. On the left side is a voice pattern associated with delivering information, instructions for an activity, or making an important point. You recognize the tone of this voice pattern as one having a relatively flat rhythm. Visually, this voice pattern is recognized by the head remaining relatively still while speaking, and then having a downward drop of the head with the last word of the sentence.

**Flat, head still, down drop at end**

**Head bob, tilt up at end**

Still not sure what this is? Think of a field reporter or evening anchor on the TV news. When they speak on an important topic, you will see and hear these things. This is a voice pattern of credibility, one we associate

**Exercise 1A: Choose Voice – Credible**

Say the following sentences aloud. At the end of each sentence drop your chin as you say the last word. You will notice your voice drops and can be perceived as being serious or important.

- Good evening
- Today, we face an uncertain future
- From the efforts of our competitors

What do you notice about your voice as you do this exercise?

When might you use this voice pattern in your speaking?

with the "important" things in life. Try this:

The other end of the voice continuum is on the right, and is a voice with rhythm. It is much more approachable, and is often used with seeking information from someone. We are instinctively approachable to enhance chances others will provide what we are seeking. In English, this voice pattern is often heard when asking a question.

The approachable voice is one of relationship. What you see in this voice pattern is a head that bobs and, at the end of the sentence, the head tends to tilt upward a

little. Watch social conversation or the opening segment of any local news program. The two newscasters will greet each other with a friendly voice pattern before shifting to a credible voice when they deliver the news. The following exercise lets you practice this voice pattern in a very contrived manner.

#### Exercise 1B: Choose Voice – Approachable

Say the following sentences aloud. As you say each sentence, bob your head up and down (this produces rhythm). At the end of each sentence lift your chin as you say the last word. You will notice your voice lifts.

- Good evening
- We face an uncertain future
- From the work of our competitors

What do you notice about your voice as you do this exercise?

How did it impact the perception of the message from the listener's viewpoint?

When might you use this voice pattern in your work?

The reason to practice this pattern in a contrived way is to increase your consciousness of it. Certainly, bad news or essential facts might be dismissed with this voice tone. At the same time, the voice of credibility sounds like an interrogation when it is delivered with the speaker's intent to create rapport. Both are very appropriate when used correctly. Both are also counterproductive when used (unconsciously) with the wrong

think of how you will use them is to practice it in a contrived and artificial manner.

## 2. Pause

The pause is the single most influential pattern you will ever use. This skill has a great influence on the listener's metabolism and attention. A well-crafted and well-timed pause influences the brain to become more attentive. The brain, like any organ, it has functions. One function is to recognize patterns and to attend to patterns that change.

In board meetings, client presentations and many other settings, having all present pay attention at one time (and every time you want it) is an amazing feat! The pause will increase the probability others will truly hear what is

### Exercise 2 : Pause

Say the following sentences aloud. This time at the end of each sentence pause 3 seconds before you say the next sentence. If you do this using a credible voice, you will "hear" the silence and notice the affect it has on your message.

- Our focus today
- Will be on our top three goals
- First is how we will increase market share by 15%
- In the next twelve months

What do you notice about the pause as you do this exercise?

When might you use the pause in your communications?

said because it represents a change in a pattern. The key to pausing is *timing* along with *stillness*. The most effective pauses are those associated with standing still

(see skill 5) and using a frozen gesture (see skill 3). To focus just on the pause, try the following exercise using the same script as that in exercise 1.

### **3. Frozen Hand Gesture**

Gestures are an integral part of the messages in our communication. Without gestures, part of the meaning of what we say is lost. We use gestures for many purposes. They can accent important points, or visually add context to the words we speak. They also indicate a relationship to the person with whom we are speaking. Gesture is linked to the spoken word so tightly, they are considered part of the same mental process, relying on each other to make the intended communication complete.

In each instance of communication, you can use gestures to gain attention in a way represents influence rather than power or authority. You see people gesture unconsciously (watch the next person you see on the street making a cell call; notice how they gesture even through the other person could never see their movements). The intention for using the gesture as described below is to learn how it can be used to "complete" communications and deliver the intended message.

It is important to note the gesture is the visual pattern that says, "pay attention" and can accompany a voice pattern that says "this is important." Both are done without overt power, but they accomplish the same intent through less-visible movements of influence.

### Exercise 3: Frozen gesture

The gesture to use in this exercise is with both arms. Bring the hands up so the elbow is at 90° and the palms are down. Okay, now put your arms at your sides, straight down.

As you say, “thank you” bring your arms up to the 90° with your palms down and freeze the gesture, snapping it into position as the “s” sound ends.

Next, say “thank you” again, this time bringing the arms up to the 90° angle but with palms up. Be sure to snap the gesture into a frozen position as you end the “s” sound.

What do you notice about the perceived “message” between the two variations of the exercise?

When might you use a gesture in your teaching?

#### 4. Incomplete sentence

The *incomplete sentence* is a sophisticated and powerful skill. Its sophistication is based on the number of individual skills necessary to implement to the entire strategy. The power of the strategy is in the influence it has on student’s attention. A well-crafted *incomplete sentence* will get the attention of students that are not paying attention or in need of management. If you are an experienced teacher you will recognize this skill as being similar in pattern to the *extended silence*.

An appropriate use of the incomplete sentence might be during a lecture segment. You may find yourself talking about a topic and notice a couple of things. First, you may notice some who look as though they are no longer paying attention. They are not being disruptive; they just have

that look that says, "I am no longer listening." You may also notice them begin to side-talk, text-message, or pull out a paper to read. You can go direct management and ask them to stop, but what do you do with those whose minds are just wandering? The answer is in this skill. Like the previous skills, this is anchored in the idea of shifting patterns to get the brain to pay attention

#### Exercise 4: Incomplete sentence

The key to this skill includes:

- Selecting a multi-syllable word (you cannot interrupt a single syllable word)
- Looking "intelligent" when you interrupt your self
- Taking a step (this adds another pattern shift)
- Starting the sentence over from the beginning

Say the following sentence and interrupt with the first syllable of "Explore."

#### **What you say**

As we exp

#### **What you do**

- \* Hold a gesture at 90° and pause 2 seconds.
- Drop your gesture to your side and take a small step (being silent)
- \* Gesture with both arms at 90° and use a slightly different voice tone than before

As we explore the next item

What do you notice if you interrupt the word "we" and do the same exercise? How is it similar and different to interrupting "Explore?"

The skill is invisible to others, and can be used anytime to draw attention to the speaker. You might see listeners stop momentarily, then look up at you. That is your cue to begin again, now with them focused on your content.

### **Freeze body**

This pattern is an eloquently simple skill, yet not often used. Standing still is challenging for many speakers. After all, the stress of speaking may unconsciously prompt one to move. Well, movement is critical; the question goes to intent.

What is your intent in the moment? If it is to get attention, standing still can be very effective. The reason is linked to the learning styles of others. People generally prefer to access communications and information in visual, auditory, or kinesthetic ways. Generally, the "visuals" are cued in to you. "Auditories" hear a lot, even when they are not watching you. In fact, the auditory is

#### Exercise 5: Freeze Body

This one is easy to do, the key is to notice the influence it has on student attention.

Let's do this one in a way that is least recommended first to get a sense of how not to do it. Then we will practice it in a way that is most recommended.

#### **What you say**

Let me say, the most important point...

#### **What you do**

Walk while you say the sentence

Let me say, the most important point...

Walk as you say, "Let me say," then stop and say "the most important point"

What do you notice about the two different patterns?

How might the most recommended way influence students in your classroom?

often the first to react to the *incomplete sentence*. The kinesthetic, respectfully, is generally focused on the rich variety of stimuli in the environment, and may often not

pay much attention. Without these skills, they may take a lot of energy to bring back to reality.

Interestingly, if you are moving and talking, a kinesthetic may be watching more than listening. To get them to listen and focus, standing still with a frozen stance can be very effective. An effective *freeze body* implemented when delivering important content can enhance memory and focus for all three learner types in the room. Remember, move between content; stand still during content. That ensures your message doesn't get lost in the movement, and that others hear what is meant rather than what might be said.

### Conclusion

The five skills described in this article are only the beginning of a set of communication patterns you can learn and use in any business setting. The good news is those trained in NCI spend more time on content and have greater impact on their communication with others. They can also sustain rapport with clients and co-workers, and significantly elevate the consistency of what others see and hear when they speak. Using NCI is good business; tools and skills that translate to better relationships, increased responsiveness and a workplace with less friction due to enhanced understanding.

For additional information on trainings in nonverbal communicative intelligence, contact Sierra Training Associates on the web at [www.sierra-training.com](http://www.sierra-training.com). You can also contact us to inquire about training and workshops centered on nonverbal communicative intelligence in the

classroom, for presentations, meetings, or customized to address your specific goals.