

Nonverbal Communication

Communication is more than verbal.

Good negotiators must first be good communicators. Unfortunately, many negotiators think of communication only as oral or written verbal exchanges, but verbal exchanges account for only a fraction of the messages people send and receive. Research has shown that 70–90% of the entire communication spectrum is nonverbal. Consequently, you should be aware of the different forms of nonverbal communication that you are likely to encounter during negotiation conferences.

Recognizing Different Forms of Nonverbal Communication

Importance of Nonverbal Communication

If you are only aware of a negotiator's verbal message, you will likely miss the major portion of the overall communication. Being aware of both nonverbal and verbal messages will give you an important edge.

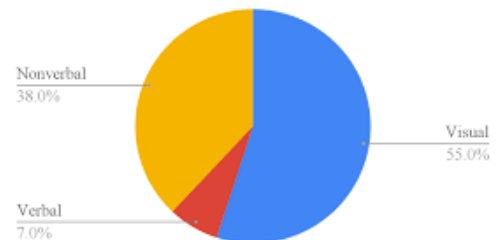
- Skills in interpreting nonverbal communications will help you glean useful information from others involved in the negotiation.
- An awareness of nonverbal communication may also prevent you from harming your own negotiation position by inadvertently sending nonverbal signals that disclose confidential information or weaknesses in your position.

Areas of Nonverbal Communication

There are many ways that people reveal themselves nonverbally. There are three areas of nonverbal communication that will most likely affect contract negotiations:

- Body language (*kinesic communication*) includes using facial expressions, body movements, gestures, and posture.
- Physical environment (*proxemic communication*) is using available space, distance from or proximity to other people, and territorial control.
- Personal attributes can involve
- Physical appearance (*artifactual communication*), including all options that communicators use to modify their appearance
- Vocal cues (*auditory communication*)
- Touch (*tactile communication*), particularly the handshake

Parts of Message



Conscious or Subliminal Messages

Nonverbal communications can involve conscious or subliminal messages.

Conscious nonverbal communications are one type of communication:

- Senders of conscious nonverbal communications are aware that they are sending a message and the general meaning of that message. For example, the individuals extending a hug know that they are embracing someone and that action is normally perceived as indicating affection.
- Receivers of conscious nonverbal communication are aware that they received the message and the meaning intended by the sender. The receiver of a hug, for example, generally realizes that the message is a sign of friendship.

Subliminal nonverbal communications are conveyed to the subconscious mind of the receiver. Receivers of subliminal messages are not consciously aware of the message. However, these messages are important.

- Gut reactions are frequently based upon your subconscious reading of subliminal nonverbal communications.
- Police and military uniforms subliminally communicate the authority of those wearing them.
- Well-dressed executives project success and credibility.
- Poor dress transmits messages of failure and a lack of credibility.
- Although subliminal messages do not create awareness on a conscious level, they still influence the receiver. In fact, subliminal messages are often more powerful than conscious messages. The advertising world is replete with examples of the value of subliminal nonverbal messages.

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- Young, beautiful people are often seen in advertisements to communicate the subconscious message that the advertised product is associated with youth and beauty.
- Companies pay large sums of money to have their products appear in movies. While these appearances are not typical product advertisements, the mere association of the product with the movie transmits subliminal messages that will influence viewers.

Voluntary or Involuntary Messages

Conscious and subliminal messages can both be transmitted voluntarily or involuntarily.

- **Involuntary nonverbal communications**—Most nonverbal messages are involuntary. In fact, many negotiators are not aware that they communicate nonverbally.
- Body language is one area where the involuntary nature of nonverbal communication is particularly evident. Every day, people unintentionally convey nonverbal signals by their facial expressions, gestures, and body postures. For example, people telling falsehoods often involuntarily send a telltale nonverbal message to listeners by frequently blinking their eyes.
- Because involuntary nonverbal communications represent unplanned physical responses, this communication form tends to be particularly revealing and more honest than verbal communication or even conscious nonverbal communication.
- **Voluntary nonverbal communications**—Nonverbal communication can also be controlled by a knowledgeable person.
- A person who knows that people telling falsehoods often blink their eyes can take special care not to blink when telling a falsehood.
- A person who knows that a hug indicates friendship can consciously hug his or her worst enemy as a trick to put the person off guard or as part of an effort to improve their relationship.

Cultural Differences

Always consider cultural differences when you send or receive nonverbal messages. A message that has a particular meaning in one society can have a completely different meaning in another society. For example, in the United States we encourage eye contact as an indicator of honesty and interest. People in some other societies believe that they should look down when talking to another person to indicate deference and respect. For them, direct eye contact might be considered offensive and disrespectful.

Article from CARE's WorkLife Solutions Website

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