

Why Body Language Matters for Leaders



As a leader you're no stranger to making crucial decisions, inspiring others, giving tough love and talking in front of individuals and big groups. Think about the last time you prepared for a presentation or spoke in front of the entire team of organization. Doing this is old hat, but you still went through your normal routine of practicing in front of the mirror and memorizing important talking points. You can do this in your sleep, but you're disciplined enough to not cut any corners. But when was the last time you stopped to think about your body language? The fact is, even if your words are the most compelling ever, they only go so far. When people listen to you speak, they aren't just listening to your words, they are subconsciously reacting to your body language. So, what exactly does that mean?

First Impressions Count

When you first meet someone, they will immediately make a judgement about you as a person. Sure, you shouldn't judge a book by its cover but unfortunately, it's human nature. Whether someone sees you as warm and trustworthy or standoffish and questionable, every interaction from that point forward will be judged through that initial filter.

In order to make that initial interaction a positive one with everyone you meet, there are some important things keep in mind.

Eye Contact

When you meet someone the last thing you should be doing is checking email on your smartphone. If your attention isn't wholly focused on the individual, you'll immediately send signals that you don't have time for them or they're unimportant. Instead, as you approach a stranger, make eye contact. Right away this conveys that you're open and friendly.

Smile

It's no secret that happiest people are the ones that smile the most. There's nothing that exudes warmth and openness like a genuine smile. When you smile, you put others at ease and allow them to let down their guard.

Lean In

Have you ever heard of Brené Brown talk about leaning in? She's talking about vulnerability. And there's a reason she chose the phrase leaning in. When you lean into someone upon meeting them, you show them that your guard isn't up and you're vulnerable, just like they are. So, when you go in for that initial handshake, meet the person you're greeting halfway.

Handshake

Speaking of shaking hands... How you shake someone's hand tells them a lot about you. If your handshake feels like someone grabbing a dead fish, you portray disinterest and lack of confidence which are huge turnoffs. On the other hand, if your handshake is firm and solid, it lets the other person know that you are genuinely excited to meet them.

Talking with Your Hands

Think about the most memorable speeches you've ever heard. Whether it was at a company event with a large group of people or just a meaningful conversation with a friend or colleague, think about what the speaker did with their hands. Chances are they weren't resting in their pockets or glued to the side of a podium. In order to add meaning to their words, great speakers use their hands to express the message they're trying to get across. So, next time you're talking with someone you want to make an impression on, don't be afraid to use your hands. This isn't something that's mechanical or that you should think too much about.

Just let it happen naturally and your listener is sure to see you in a favorable light.

The Importance of Face-to-Face

Even though the majority of modern communication occurs over text messages, emails or video, there is no substitute for face-to-face. Sure, our ability to share information quickly and easily has made our lives easier, but the fact remains that it takes talking to someone in person to develop a real connection and build rapport. This kind of communication allows you to both send and receive so much more information than what is being said. Things like tone of voice, open body language, hand gestures, pacing and eye contact can shape someone's opinion of you even more than the words you say.

As a leader, it's your job to communicate with people. You wouldn't be in the position you are if you didn't know what to say. But, what is often forgotten is that words only tell half the story. People read body language more than they listen to words. With that in mind, if you can become a master of using positive body language when communicating with others, your potential to lead and inspire is unlimited.

As a recruiter for the [Life Sciences industries in the Bay Area](#), I would work with business leaders to improve internal company processes through hiring the right employees. If you are looking for a new employee in the [pharmaceutical, medical device, or biotech industries in the Bay Area](#), contact me, Jeff King.