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**Joe Navarro M.A.Spycatcher**

## "Cool" Body Language

What cooling behaviors say about our emotions.

Posted Feb 07, 2012

About thirty-five years ago when I first got into law enforcement I began to observe that suspects often ventilated themselves during interviews while the innocent did not. This served me well, not in detecting deception, but rather, in seeing which questions caused the suspects discomfort such as when I asked, "Where were you last night?" I used it to gauge psychological comfort and discomfort - invaluable in determining the thoughts and feelings of others.

At this point you may be saying, "*Ventilators*, don't we do that when we are hot?" Yes and then there was Rodney Dangerfield when he was getting "no respect." All true, but principally we do it when something is bothering us or there are issues. What is great about ventilating behaviors is that they occur in real time, there is no delay. A young man is worried that he will miss his flight and he will repeatedly lift up his baseball cap and run his fingers through his hair. Once he is on board, as happened the other day, the behavior stops.

So lets set temperature aside. What would cause us to self ventilate? The list is long: insecurity, doubt, fear, apprehension, a sense of weakness, vulnerability, or anxiety - all the things cause psychological discomfort. So it doesn't matter if we are taking a school test or being asked questions during an interview for a job, ventilators may show up, especially if we feel psychologically distressed.

So here are some to look for and whenever you see them ask yourself, "Is it the room temperature or is there some issue here?":

1 - Look for individuals to run their fingers through their hair multiple times in quick succession. Women incidentally are less like to do so.

2 - People who wear hats will lift their hat completely off the head or angle it upward in such a way as to let in air. Sometimes also followed by running fingers through the hair.

3 - Women ventilate slightly differently than men when it comes to hair. If they have hair down to the neck they will lift up the hair at the nape of the neck brushing the hair upward - an effort to allow air to cool the neck.

4 - Look for individuals under stress to pull on their shirt buttons or the front of their shirt by lifting it away from the skin. This may be repeated by both hands lifting up the shirt simultaneously just above the pectorals. The lifting of the shirt allows air to flow beneath the fabric cooling the skin.

5 - Pulling at the shirt collar is also often missed when it is done slowly and without much fanfare unlike our comedian friend Rodney Dangerfield who would tug at his neck collar dramatically.

6- I have seen individuals take their shirttail out, undo their pants, and put the shirt back in again, also in an effort to ventilate.

7- It may not look like ventilating, but look for men to lift up or tug on the shoulder pad of their jacket. This pulling action seeks to let in air - which may or may not work because of the amount of clothes.

8- One you may never have thought about, and that is that when we yawn, that sudden burst of air through our very vascular mouth, will also serve to ventilate us (cools our blood like a radiator) as well as pacifies us. Incidentally when you see a baby yawning repeatedly check to see if they are flushed or their face is hot, they may just be communicating it's hot - and yes they could be communicating their tired - either way check on them.

So there you are a few behaviors dealing with ventilation you never thought about and yet we have all done them to relieve us from the heat, but more importantly to relieve stress.

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Joe Navarro, M.A. is 25 year veteran of the FBI and is the author of *What Every Body is Saying*(link is external), as well as *Louder Than Words*(link is external). For additional information and a free bibliography please contact him through [www.jnforensics.com](http://www.jnforensics.com)(link is external) or follow on twitter: @navarrotells or on Facebook. You can also read other Psychology Today articles here. Copyright (c) 2012, Joe Navarro.

Emma M. Seppälä Ph.D. Feeling It

# *Reading Bodies, Touching Minds: The Mystery of Empathy*

How eye contact, facial expressions, and body language are the key to connection

Posted Oct 02, 2012

Just by looking at someone, you experience them. Ever fallen in love at first sight or had a "gut feeling" about someone? You internally resonated with them. Ever seen someone trip and momentarily felt a twinge of pain for them? Observing them activates the "pain matrix" in your brain, research(link is external) shows. Ever been moved by the sight of a person helping someone? You vicariously experienced it and thereby felt elevation(link is external).

We are wired to read each others' bodies. Not just in terms of physical appearance but at a subtler and more complex level that lies at the root of lasting love, empathy and social connection. This process is called "resonance" and it is so automatic and rapid that it often happens unconsciously.

Like an acute sounding board, parts of our brain internally echo what others do and feel. Appropriately called "mirror neurons(link is external)," they serve as in-built monitors that reflect other people's state of mind. Someone's smile, for example, activates the smile muscles in our faces, while a frown activates our frown muscles, according to research by Ulf Dimberg(link is external) at Uppsala University in Sweden.

Before even talking to someone, you have already downloaded large amounts of information about them on a subconscious level. "We are programmed to observe each other's states so we can more appropriately interact, empathize, or assert our boundaries, whatever the situation may require," says Paula Niedenthal(link is external), Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison specialized in resonance.

## **Go on, Smile**

Eye-contact is the crucial first step for resonance, according to Niedenthal. Smiling is a close second. Our brain actually seems prewired to recognize smiles above and beyond any other facial expression. In an experimental procedure in which participants had to recognize facial expressions, they were quicker to recognize positive facial expressions, such as smiles, than any other facial expression of emotion. Niedenthal's research(link is external) shows that not only do we trigger others' smile muscles, but we ourselves reap the

benefits thereof: Both the act of smiling and seeing someone else smile is rewarding, activation neural circuits in the brain associated with happiness and well-being. Ever had that awkward moment when you smile at someone and they don't smile back? Well don't worry, you're actually doing yourself and them a favor by activating both of your smile muscles and the associated neurochemical reaction of well-being. According to the Facial Feedback Hypothesis(link is external), you will both end up feeling happier.

## **Romance and Resonance**

Resonance may also be at the root of long-term romance. In a study by Niedenthal(link is external) of couples that had been married for 25 years, she found that the partners' faces tended to look alike over time and that, the more successful and happy their marriage, the more alike they looked. From these findings, she concluded that their facial morphology had become similar through years of resonating with each other.

By understanding each other's internal states, they were able to support and respond to each other more appropriately and derive satisfaction from their marriage.

## **Empathy and Botox**

Interestingly, if we somehow block our ability to mimic or "resonate," our own ability to read others decreases. Researchers(link is external) approached people who were about to receive a botox injection that paralyzes the muscles between their eyebrows. Botox prevents the brows from furrowing to reduce wrinkles and thereby blocks the ability to resonate as well. Low and behold, botox thereby also slowed participants' ability to empathize and understand other people's emotions presumably because they could no longer resonate as quickly as before.

## **Resonance, Unconscious Processing & Gut Feelings**

Our brain is wired to read cues so subtle that although our brain may not consciously register them ("he doesn't seem angry"), our body will respond. For example, when someone is angry but keeps their feelings bottled up they may not look angry on the outside but our blood pressure will increase, according to research by James Gross at Stanford University(link is external). We might feel uncomfortable around that person without understanding why. This may be a clue into "gut feelings."

We are so sensitive to physical cues that we will respond to them even in a robot. In a recent study by David Desteno(link is external), a robot was programmed to display 3 gestures associated with mistrust (crossing arms, touching face and hands, or leaning back) in an interaction with a participant. Although the participants knew that they were engaging with a robot, the very fact that it displayed those gestures caused them to judge the robot as untrustworthy.

## Social Connection, Vulnerability & Resonance

My first post discussed the critical importance of social connection for health and well-being. Resonance is one of the keys to social connection. As discussed in my second post, vulnerability is another key, particularly for intimacy. Establishing eye-contact, smiling at a stranger assumes the openness, courage, and the willingness to go out on a limb and be vulnerable.

For those who think doing so is too much of a challenge, Carol Dweck([link is external](#))'s ground-breaking research has repeatedly shown that our beliefs shape our experiences in life. If we understand that the brain is wired to adapt to learn and change, we will also have the ability and courage to do so. People who are willing to go out on a limb by connecting with others through a smile create a positive feedback loop: smiles engage others, invite positive interactions, create social bonds, and develop a sense of connection that reinforces the inclination to smile again. To quote Louis Armstrong, "when you smile, the whole world smiles with you."

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*To stay updated on the science of happiness, health and social connection, see emmaseppala.com([link is external](#)).*

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# *Body Language Basics*

The honesty of body language

Posted Aug 21, 2011

*"If language was given to men to conceal their thoughts, then gesture's purpose was to disclose them."* John Napier

For millions of years, our early ancestors ambled on this planet, navigating a very dangerous world. They did so by communicating effectively their needs, emotions, fears, and desires with each other. Impressively, they achieved this through the use of nonverbal communications such as physiological changes (flushed face), gestures (pointing hand), noises (grunting is not a word) and facial or body reactions (quizzical or frightened look). This has been part of our biological heritage for so long that we still primarily communicate nonverbally, not verbally, and why we need emotional icons in our written communication.

Fortunately for us we evolved a system to immediately communicate to others how we feel and what we sense. If not for this, a room might be dangerously hot - not just warm and a swim in a lake might turn into hypothermia. If we had to think, even for a few seconds, at every perilous encounter (imagine a coiled rattle snake by your leg) we would have died out as a species. Instead we evolved to react to threats or anything that might harm us and not to think (the "freeze, flight, fight response" I talk about in [\*Louder Than Words\*](#)(*link is external*)).

This system that evolved over time, which alerts us instantly of any perceived danger, also instantly communicates to others around us. Just as our brain forces us to freeze in place when we see an aggressive dog or large felines while on safari, it also communicates to others instantly, through our bodies, whether or not we are comfortable or uncomfortable, content or miserable, safe or unsafe. The benefit is two fold, we react to the world around us and others benefit from our early reactions even as we do from theirs. For example, taste something putrid and everyone around you will know from your expression; they don't need to taste it also. Quick, authentic, and reliable: [body language](#) as I said in [\*What Every Body is Saying\*](#)(*link is external*), is the "shortcut to communicating what is most important" because it has been evolutionarily beneficial.

And it is not just about survival or threats, although that is the primary reason we react to certain things so visibly (loud sounds make us freeze or cower in place). Our brain also telegraphs our intentions. This is why when you are talking to someone you like and suddenly you notice that one of their feet points toward their car or an elevator, you know that the person probably needs to go. Because they are running late, the body through the legs communicates that something urgent is pressing (causing psychological discomfort) even

though the person continues the conversation. Which is why we say when it comes to communication, body language is more truthful than the spoken word.

So what is psychologically behind all of this? Simply this: Our needs, feelings, thoughts, emotions, and intentions are processed elegantly by what is known as the "limbic system" of the brain. It doesn't have to think, it just reacts to the world in real time and our bodies show how we feel. Someone gives us bad news and our lips compress; the bus leaves without us and we are clenching our jaws and rubbing our necks. We are asked to work another weekend and the orbits of our eyes narrow as our chin lowers. These are discomfort displays that our limbic brain has perfected over millions of years, whether we are in China or Chile.

Conversely, when we see someone we really like, our eyebrows will arch defying gravity, our facial muscles will relax, and our arms become more pliable (even extended) so we can welcome this person. In the presence of someone we love, we will mirror their behavior (*isopraxis*), tilt our heads, and blood will flow to our lips making them full, even as our pupils dilate. Once again, our limbic brain communicates through our bodies precisely the true sentiments that we feel and orchestrates accurate corresponding nonverbal displays.

In a way, our bodies don't really have to do these behaviors and yet we evolved to demonstrate them for a reason: we are social animals that need to communicate both verbally and nonverbally. How do we know body language is essential for us? Children who are born blind, having never seen these behaviors will also perform them. A blind child will cover his eyes when he hears something he doesn't like in the same way my neighbor does whenever I ask him to help me move heavy objects. Fortunately these behaviors are hard-wired.

Whether in business, at home, or in relationships, we can always be assured that true sentiments will be reflected in our body language through displays of comfort and discomfort. This binary system of communicating how we feel has stood the test of time and survived to help us through its elegant simplicity.

Obviously this can be very effective in determining how others feel about us and in evaluating how a relationship is evolving. Often when people sense that something is wrong in a relationship, what they are sensing are changes in body language displays. Couples who no longer touch or walk close together are easy to spot but sometimes the more subtle behaviors are even more accurate. An example of this is when couples touch each other with their fingertips rather than their full hand (distancing behavior) indicative of psychological discomfort. This behavior alone may portend serious problems in the relationship that on the surface may not be so obvious ([\*Clues to Deceit\*](#)(link is external)).

And so while there are many aspects of nonverbal communications and body language, focusing on comfort and discomfort can go a long way in helping us to see more clearly what others are truly feeling, thinking,

fearing or desiring. Having that extra insight gives us a more honest appraisal of others and it will in the end assist us in communicating more effectively and empathetically for a deeper understanding.

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# 10 Simple and Powerful Body Language Tips

POSTED ON DEC 30, 2014 IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS, INTERNAL & EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS | [HTTP://WWW.COMMPRO.BIZ/CORPORATE-COMMUNICATIONS/INTERNAL-EMPLOYEE-COMMUNICATIONS/10-SIMPLE-POWERFUL-BODY-LANGUAGE-TIPS/](http://www.commpro.biz/corporate-communications/internal-employee-communications/10-simple-powerful-body-language-tips/)

By Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D

Since writing "[The Silent Language of Leaders](#)" three years ago, and "[The Nonverbal Advantage](#)" a couple of years before that, I've spoken to over two hundred business, university, association, and government audiences — and, in the process of preparing to address these very savvy professionals, I've discovered even more about the role of body language in business success.

**Here are my ten simple and powerful body language tips for 2014:**

## **1) Before an important meeting, breathe through your mouth.**

Right before you enter the meeting room, take a deep breath and exhale through your mouth. (If you are unobserved, make a soft "ahh" sound.) Doing so releases the tension in your neck, shoulders and jaw that can make you look rigid or aggressive.

## **2) When making a formal presentation, move then pause.**

Human beings are drawn to movement. If you move when you speak, you'll get people's attention. It can be especially effective to move toward the audience before making a key point, and away when you want to signal a break or a change of subject. You can also use space to reinforce your ideas. For example, if you're presenting three issues, talk about each of them from a different physical position. Or if you have "bad" news and "good" news, you can present each from different sides of the stage or platform. (Just be sure to make your closing remarks while standing on the "good" side.) But don't move while making a crucial comment. You have the most impact when you combine movement with physical pauses in which you stand absolutely still to highlight your most important points.

## **3) To look decisive, rotate your palms down.**

In essence, gestures with palms exposed show that you are open and willing to negotiate on a particular point, while palms turned down indicate that you are closed to negotiation. But people also automatically pronate their hands when they feel strongly about something. In fact, a definitive gesture of authority when you speak is placing both hands, palms down, on or right above the conference table.

## **4) If you want to be taken seriously, speak up early.**

When you hang back in a meeting, only to offer your opinion toward the end of the conversation, your input is more likely to be discounted. By speaking up early, even if it on some trivial matter, you establish yourself as someone who is "at the table" and ready to participate. Then later, when you present your insights and suggestions, they will be better received.

## **5) To know when people want to leave, watch for seated readiness.**

People often signal that they are ready to end a conversation by assuming the position of someone ready to rise. (They may move to the edge of the chair, or lean forward with hands on the arms of the chair or hands on knees.) If you are aware of someone assuming these postures while you are speaking, you should respect that signal by quickly finishing what you are saying.

## **6) To sharpen your negotiating skills, notice how fast you can make or break rapport.**

While seated at a conference table across from your counterpart, push back from the table and lean away from him or her. You'll most likely see your counterpart react in kind by backing away from you. Now lean forward and put your hands on the table (with your palms showing), look him or her in the eyes and smile. Watch as

the interaction warms up and is much more friendly and open. That's how fast your body language can help you build or break rapport.

**7) When you want your team to collaborate, start marching.**

Ensemble marching, singing, dancing, and drumming are all examples of activities that lead group members to act in synchrony with each other. Stanford University conducted research that showed that synchronous activity motivates members of a group to contribute toward the collective good. Across three experiments, people acting in synchrony with others cooperated more in subsequent group economic exercises, even in situations requiring sacrifice on a personal level from the group.

**8) To sound dynamic, widen your stance.**

Your voice comes from your entire body, not just your mouth. Your body helps you become a more dynamic speaker when it is grounded — feet planted firmly on the floor, a hips-width apart, with your weight evenly distributed. A broad stance like this calms your nervous system, allows you to breathe with ease, and amplifies your voice. (This tip comes from Rhoda Agin, a speech and voice therapist.)

**9) To stay in control, back up.**

Research at Radboud University, Netherlands, showed how backward motion was a powerful way to enhance cognitive control. The researchers found that when people encounter a difficult situation, getting them to step back (literally) boosted their ability to cope.

**10) To increase team productivity, keep your body language open.**

People are constantly monitoring their leader for emotional cues. If your body looks closed, depressed or angry, these postures (and their corresponding emotions) will be subconsciously picked up and mimicked by your team. It's a process called "emotional contagion" – and it can also work in your favor. If you keep your posture relaxed, inclusive and open, your team will respond by being more cohesive, positive and productive.

By the way: Just because these ten tips are simple, don't underestimate their power. Small nonverbal changes can make a big difference in how people perceive and relate to you.

**About the Author:** *Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., is a keynote speaker, leadership communication consultant, body language coach, and author of "The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help – or Hurt – How You Lead" and "The Truth About Lies in the Workplace: How to Spot Liars and What to Do about Them." Carol can be reached by email: [CGoman@CKG.com](mailto:CGoman@CKG.com), phone: 510-526-1727, or through her website: [www.CKG.com](http://www.CKG.com).*