



## Use of Non-Verbal Communication in Effective Interpersonal Communication

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Non-verbal communication is a type of communication without the use of words or language i.e. through facial expressions, body language/kinesis, proxemics, colours, appearance, time, touch etc. It consists of a bigger part of our daily life than verbal communication. A lot of studies have been carried out on interpersonal communication which showed that very less percentage of communication involves words, whereas the majority is being done by voice tone, sounds and a variety of other means such as kinesics, haptics, proxemics, paralanguage, and chronemics as well as posture, sound symbols and silence which may either replace or accompany words. The interpersonal communication is essential and often determines our success in life besides influencing our perception, attitude, judgements etc. Hence, it is not only about mere communication but effective communication since we do not simply want the message to reach the receiver but also to be interpreted by the receiver with the same intention of message as sent by the sender. Effective communication includes the best use of words as well as the use of all non-verbal signals, listening, assertiveness in speech and ability to understand others' state of mind. Therefore, non-verbal communication plays an important role in effective interpersonal communication. The non-verbal communication includes a variety of different means which are briefly discussed below:-

- a) **Facial expressions-** Facial expressions make a huge proportion of non-verbal communication. Just see how much information can be conveyed with a smile or a frown. The look on a person's face is often the first thing we see, even before we hear what he/she has to say. The expression of sadness, happiness, anger, fear, shock etc. can be clearly visible on face irrespective of our wide differences in culture or nation to which we belong.
- b) **Gestures and postures-** Gestures mean the movement of body parts/hands in certain ways such as waving, pointing, giving a 'thumbs up' sign etc. According to a study, people can do up to 270,000 types of gestures and movement. Posture offers insight into a culture's deep structure. For example, in Japan low posture is an indicator of respect although it appears simple to the outsider. However, the bowing ritual is rather complex- the person who occupies the lower status begins bowing his/her head and his/her bow must be deeper than the other person's. The superior, on the other hand, determines when the bowing is to end. When the participants are of equal rank, they begin the bow in the same manner and end at the same time.
- c) **Paralinguistics-** Paralinguistics refers to vocal communication that is separate from actual language. This form of non-verbal communication includes factors such as tone of voice, inflection and pitch. A simple sentence spoken in different tone can have different

meanings and the pitch of your voice can also help in depicting one's feelings whether nervousness, happiness, enthusiasm, anger etc.

- d) **Proxemics-** Proxemics means language of space i.e. the amount of distance we need and the amount of space we perceive as belonging to us is influenced by several factors. Among them are social norms, cultural expectations, situational factors, personality characteristics, and at the level of familiarity. Dr. Edward T. Hall categorized proxemics into four zones viz; *Intimate* (upto18inches/1.5feet, generally with family members or life partner), *Personal* (1.5-4feet, with friends or colleagues), *Social* (4-12feet, generally with strangers) and *Public* (>12feet).
- e) **Eye gaze-** The non-verbal communication through eyes includes looking, staring and blinking etc. For example, when you face people or things that you like, your rate of blinking may increase, and your pupils dilate. People's eyes can indicate a range of emotions including hostility, interest, attraction or other feelings. The eye gaze is also used to determine whether someone is being honest or not. Normal steady eye contact is often taken as a sign that a person is telling the truth and trustworthy while shifty eyes and an inability to maintain eye contact is frequently seen as an indicator that someone is lying or being deceptive.
- f) **Haptics-** Communicating through touch is another important non-verbal communication behaviour which can be used to communicate affection, familiarity, sympathy, empathy and other emotions. The sex differences also play a role in how people utilize touch to communicate its meaning. Women tend to use touch to convey care, concern and nurturance while men, on the other hand, are more likely to use touch to assert power or control over others.
- g) **Appearance-** Our choice of clothing, colour of clothes, hairstyle and other appearance factors are also a part of non-verbal communication. When we meet someone, one of the first things they see is our appearance. Wearing clothes to the occasions is important like while appearing for interview. If the person's dress is neat and facial expression is mild, people will be willing to talk to him/her. Besides, the colour of our clothes affects the mood of the one wearing and the people around him/her. For example, yellow colour represents joy while white colour brings peace. Furthermore, it is also a means for the people to judge someone's personality and sometimes make perceptions before you speak.
- h) **Artifacts-** Objects and images are also tools that can be used to communicate non-verbally. Uniforms, for example, can be used to transmit a tremendous amount of information about a person such as a police officer will wear a specific uniform, a black coat worn by lawyers/advocates and a white coat worn by a doctor. At a mere glance, these outfits tell others what that person does for a living.

Apart from the above types of non-verbal communication, how we can understand the different non-verbal cues to read someone's mind. For this purpose, it is essential to first understand the different cues and how to read them which can be achieved by experience or learning. Below are given certain tips to read some of the non-verbal cues:-

- ❖ **Aggressive:** frowns, pursed lips, glaring, squinting, clenching fists, red face, invading personal space, shaking a finger, sudden movement.
- ❖ **Attentive:** holding still while listening, leaning forward, gazing, ignoring distractions, nodding slowly, paraphrasing what's been said.
- ❖ **Bored:** looking around, drumming fingers, yawning, slouching, finding other things to do, looking at the clock repeatedly.
- ❖ **Deceptive:** forced smiles (eyes aren't smiling when the mouth is), sweating, sudden movements, twitching, seems distracted, fidgeting.

- ❖ **Defensive:** covering vital organs, lowering chin, crossing arms, using a physical barrier, making oneself small, tensing up, glancing around as if looking for an escape.
- ❖ **Relaxed:** steady breathing, lowered voice, arms hang to sides, using hands when talking, smooth gestures, smiling, even speed and pitch in speaking, little blinking, unwrinkled forehead.

### Ways to improve non-verbal communication

- ❖ **Take time to smile-** A smile can put the people around you at ease. It appears welcoming/polite and encourages them to listen to you more.
- ❖ **Be energetic-** Always stay ahead of your competitors. An upright posture appears professional and gives an impression of interest to others. If you are attentive and lively, others will likely to see you as an inspiration.
- ❖ **Test your body language-** Observe your body language for a week in the beginning and carefully monitor your posture, facial expression and body language during meetings, presentations and casual exchanges. Note how others react to your facial expressions and posture. Seeing how others respond to your day-to-day non-verbal communications can help you adjust as needed.
- ❖ **Understand how your feelings affect you physically-** Emotions have both mental and physical effects. Feelings such as frustration, boredom, strength or delight all have different influences on your body. For instance, you might notice a tight stomach when anxious. Therefore, if you become aware of how your body responds to your emotions can make you an expert in controlling them and improving your external presentation.
- ❖ **Act intentionally-** Be mindful while using body language or facial expressions when communicating with others. Use your body language to enhance the conversation and people to know how you are feeling to that particular situation.
- ❖ **Find and use other effective ways of communicating in a non-verbal manner-** Watch around you and see how others or professional persons communicate non-verbally, can help you see what works well in your work environment. You can learn and use them accordingly to make interpersonal communication effective. For example, when you see someone nodding their head to communicate approval, you can also nod your head to show your approval.

### Conclusion

Non-verbal communication consists of a bigger portion of our daily life. The non-verbal signals are helpful in understanding someone's state of mind as well as they are helpful to enhance our interpersonal communication skills. This can be achieved through some simple exercises in order to make people listen to you and effectively deliver the speech to the audience.

### References

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