THE SILENT LANGUAGE OF LEADERS

HOW BODY LANGUAGE CAN HELP—OR HURT—HOW YOU LEAD

CAROL KINSEY GOMAN
MORE PRAISE FOR THE SILENT LANGUAGE OF LEADERS

“Learn to align your verbal and non-verbal communication and you are on your way to becoming a better leader. *The Silent Language of Leaders* is the only book you need to bring yourself up to speed.”

—Karen Tucker, CEO, Churchill Club

“Successful business executives understand and achieve higher levels of effectiveness when their words are in sync with their body language. Carol Kinsey Goman’s new book showcases the important body language techniques needed to build trust in a rapidly changing world. Savvy executives will use her recommendations immediately to build stronger relationships, shape perceptions, and get results.”

—Lee Hornick, program director, The Conference Board, and president, Business Communications Worldwide, Inc.

“This book is an outstanding resource to help managers at all levels become better communicators and leaders.”

—Shirley Gaufin, chief human resources officer, Black & Veatch Corporation
“Whether it’s in front of an individual or a large group, communication is a key component of your leadership success. And a major aspect of that success is your body language. This silent method of communication can be deadly if you don’t know the signals that you are sending. Carol Kinsey Goman provides a guidebook to help you navigate this complex aspect of leadership.”

—Jon Peters, president, The Institute for Management Studies

“People don’t realize how their true strengths and weaknesses are revealed by their body language. Carol Kinsey Goman’s observations and insights are unique.”

—Charles Lynch, chairman, Market Value Partners
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THE SILENT LANGUAGE of LEADERS
INTRODUCTION

The Leadership–Body Language Connection

Leadership is about communication. You already know that. So, in preparing for an important meeting, you concentrate on what to say, you memorize crucial points, and you rehearse your presentation so that you will come across as credible and convincing.

But did you also know that the people you’re speaking to will have subliminally evaluated your credibility, confidence, likeability, and trustworthiness in the first seven seconds—before you had a chance to deliver your well-rehearsed speaking points? Did you know that your use of personal space, physical gestures, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact could already have sabotaged your message? And, most critically, did you know that any time your words and body language were
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out of alignment, people believed what they saw and not what you said?

So, if you went into that important meeting with all the right words and all the wrong moves, you probably left sensing that things didn’t go as well as you’d hoped. But you might not know why.

Leadership is also about building and sustaining positive relationships. You know that too. You travel to meet personally with key customers, go out with coworkers to get to know them better, arrange “town hall” meetings in order to interact more closely with frontline workers.

But did you know that your ability to accurately read and respond to the body language of others is fundamental to building empathy and rapport? If you misinterpreted and ignored important nonverbal signals from your colleagues, customers, or employees, you probably parted company feeling vaguely dissatisfied with the relationship you’d established, again not knowing why, but realizing something needed to be done about it.

That’s when you might hire me.

I get paid to stalk leaders.

Well, not literally, but that is how one of my satisfied clients humorously described my services.

I’m a professional communicator, the author of eleven business books, and an international keynote speaker. But when I’m not traveling around the world on speaking engagements, I coach people like you—managers, team leaders, entrepreneurs, and senior executives who are
looking for ways to become even more effective in their ability to relate with and influence others.

So, I stalk—more accurately, “shadow”—these leaders, observing them as they run meetings, interact informally with employees and colleagues, consult with customers, negotiate business deals, and make formal presentations.

**OH, THE THINGS I’VE SEEN!**

Body language is the management of time, space, appearance, posture, gesture, vocal prosody, touch, smell, facial expression, and eye contact. The latest research in neuroscience and psychology has proven that body language is crucial to leadership effectiveness—and this book will show you exactly how it impacts a leader’s ability to negotiate, manage change, build trust, project charisma, and promote collaboration. But my interest in body language started long before I gave speeches or coached leaders. In training for my previous occupation as a therapist in private practice, I learned to pay close attention to nonverbal signals. In doing so, I became aware of the way body language can underscore what a person is saying, but can also undermine or even contradict it. When very relaxed, people had certain ways of entering my office and certain physical positions that they assumed. But when they were concerned or unconvinced, their postures and expressions changed dramatically. I also saw that quite often their body language was in
direct opposition to their words, and I learned to trust the subliminal messages from their bodies as much as, or more than, their verbal responses. Soon it became second nature to “decode” body language cues and to use what I discovered to help people overcome internal resistance and to reinforce personal motivation in order to make positive changes in their lives.

When I started to coach organizational leaders, I was surprised to find how unfamiliar businesspeople were with nonverbal communication. For the past twenty years, I’ve studied and been awed by the impact of body language on leadership results. I’ve seen firsthand how nonverbal signals can literally make or break a leader’s success. I also saw that most leaders were nonverbally illiterate—completely out of touch with the effect their body language had on others and unaware of the clear nonverbal signals that were being sent by clients and colleagues in every business encounter. The human brain is hardwired to read and respond to these signals, but most leaders don’t know that the process is taking place and are unequipped, therefore, to use it to their advantage.

**THE TIME IS RIGHT**

It’s a great time to start building your nonverbal intelligence. In fact, your timing couldn’t be better. Three factors have come together to put body language skills at the top of a leader’s to-do list: (1) the visual technology
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revolution, (2) advances in scientific research that provide direct links between body language and leadership results, and (3) the growing importance of cross-cultural communication with the global workforce.

The Visual Technology Revolution

Smile—you’re on someone’s camera! From YouTube postings to cell phones with video capability to image-driven social media, there is no escaping the visual technology revolution. And we are only beginning to see the impact of this revolution on businesses around the world.

Cisco System’s TelePresence is only one example of a number of new products geared for the workplace. This new generation of videoconferencing technology allows people in different locations to meet as though they were face-to-face, with high-definition video and audio streaming in real time, no matter what the distance.

Technological advances will continue to revolutionize the way enterprises, employees, and consumers communicate and interact. As multimedia applications become increasingly utilized and integrated, users will demand to be able to access these applications wherever they are and on any device, just as they do voice and data. For example, in the future, the ability to set up a Cisco TelePresence session will be as easy and as commonplace as making a phone call is today.
The Silent Language of Leaders

Science, Leadership, and Body Language

Research by the MIT Media Lab shows the ways that subtle nonverbal cues provide powerful signals about what’s really going on in a business interaction. For example, whether you win or lose a negotiation is strongly influenced by unconscious factors, such as the way your body postures match those of the other person, the level of physical activity as you talk, and the degree to which one of you sets the tone—literally—of the conversation. Through the use of devices (called Sociometers) that monitor and analyze patterns of unconscious social signals passing between people, researchers with no knowledge of a conversation’s content can predict the outcome of a negotiation, a presentation of a business plan, or a job interview in the first two minutes of that interaction.

But nothing has contributed more to the scientific validity of reading body language than neuroscience and the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses radio waves and a strong magnetic field to take clear and detailed pictures of internal organs and tissues. FMRI applies this technology to identifying regions of the brain where blood vessels are expanding, chemical changes are taking place, or extra oxygen is being delivered.

FMRI has been held up as a breakthrough technology for better understanding the brain, and it has added great credibility to nonverbal communication. Consider, for
example, the research from Duke University that shows why we like and remember those who smile at us: using fMRI, the Duke researchers found that the orbitofrontal cortices (a “reward center” in the brain) were more active when subjects were learning and recalling the names of smiling individuals.²

Global Workforce

The tricky thing about body language is that we are often unaware of how we are reacting to it. We may form a negative opinion about someone because he slouches, won’t look us in the eye (or looks too intently), or stands too close to us when he speaks. Because we are unaware of how or why we made the judgment, we are unable to filter out our biases. And nowhere is this problem more evident than when we are reacting to nonverbal communication from people in different cultures.

I’ll discuss approaches to this problem later in the book, but remember for now that your success as a leader will depend increasingly on your ability to get top business results with a multinational workforce—not just because participating in global teams is fast becoming part of your job description, but also because the workforce within your own national borders is growing more and more diverse, ethnically and culturally, every day. Understanding the similarities and accommodating the differences in multicultural body language are key elements of this success.
You picked up this book because you realize (or suspect) that nonverbal communication can be used to your leadership advantage. I wrote *The Silent Language of Leaders* to give savvy leaders like you that nonverbal "edge." This book is unlike any other body language book on the market. It speaks directly to leadership situations you face every day and offers insights and practical strategies for those situations to help you become an even more effective communicator and leader.

This book presents a key leadership strategy in an engaging and pragmatic way. Throughout the book you’ll find real-life leadership examples and effective body language suggestions for a variety of workplace situations—along with the latest scientific research that backs them up. Here’s a brief overview.

Chapter One, Leadership at a Glance, lays a framework for the book by giving an overview of the importance of body language to leadership success. It covers your personal “curb appeal”—the first impression people have of you, the nonverbal signals that are most important for leadership, the mistakes people make reading you, and why the key to effective body language is in the eye of the beholder.

Following this introductory overview, the next three chapters highlight the power of body language in crucial aspects of leadership and show you how to harness that
power. Each chapter explains what other people are telling you with their nonverbal signals, and each offers strategies for adjusting your own body language for maximum effect.

Chapter Two, Negotiation, covers the nonverbal intelligence you need in a negotiation. It includes tips on reading the body language responses of your counterpart, how to project comfort and credibility, how to make a positive impression in the first seven seconds, how to use power cues to regain the upper hand, and what body language can tell you about candor and deception. Chapter Three, Leading Change, looks at how to use body language to minimize resistance and build employee commitment to organizational transformation. It gives you guidelines for making formal change announcements and explores the power of emotion (emotional contagion, emotional overflow, emotional suppression) and why it is so difficult to hide what you feel. Then it asks (and answers) the intriguing question: Can you fake charisma? Chapter Four, Collaboration, looks at the body language of inclusion and motivation. It highlights the importance of eye contact and the use of “mirroring” to make everyone on the team feel valued. It explains why your paralinguistics (how you say what you say) are so important, why it matters where you sit in a meeting, and what your office says about you as a collaborative leader. Chapter Five, Communicating Virtually and Face-to-Face, examines what brain research tells us about body language in the digital age. It covers the use
of nonverbal communication in virtual environments, the advantages of face-to-face meetings, and why the impact of some body language signals is greater in a videoconference than in person.

Chapter Six, He Leads, She Leads, deals with gender differences in body language and how these differences impact male and female leadership effectiveness. In this chapter you’ll learn the body language strengths and weaknesses that men and women bring to their leadership roles and what both can learn about communicating more effectively.

Chapter Seven, Working with Global Teams, examines which body language signals are universal and which are culturally determined. You’ll discover why body language that feels so right in one culture may be ineffective or even offensive in another. The Silent Language of Leaders is also the first body language book to feature a global panel of professionals commenting on the impact of nonverbal communication, and Chapter Eight, International Body Language, is written from this multinational viewpoint. In it, twelve global communicators give cross-cultural and nonverbal business advice to visiting executives.

Chapter Nine, The Nonverbal Future of Leadership, takes a look at the values and expectations of the newest generation of workers, the coming advances in communication technologies, a new model for leadership—and how
Introduction

all these factors will combine to make body language skills even more crucial for leaders in the future.

FROM GOOD TO OUTSTANDING

I am occasionally hired by an organization to coach an underperforming leader, but I most often coach leaders who are already good at their jobs. And I love the process of working with smart, talented, and motivated professionals and watching them achieve outstanding leadership results.

When properly used, body language can be your key to greater success. It can help you develop positive business relationships, influence and motivate the people who report to you, improve productivity, bond with members of your team, present your ideas with more impact, work effectively in a multicultural world, and project your personal brand of charisma. It is a “secret weapon” that many great leaders have learned to use to their advantage. Now you can too!
LEADERSHIP AT A GLANCE

How People Read the Body Language of Leaders

The senior vice president of a Fortune 500 company is speaking at a leadership conference in New York. He’s a polished presenter with an impressive selection of organizational “war stories” delivered with a charming, self-deprecating sense of humor. The audience likes him. They like him a lot.

Then, as he finishes his comments, he folds his arms across his chest and says, “I’m open for questions. Please, ask me anything.”

At this point, there is a noticeable shift of energy in the room—from engagement to uncertainty. The
The Silent Language of Leaders

audience that was so attentive only moments ago is now somehow unable to think of anything to ask.

I was at that event. As one of the speakers scheduled to follow the executive, I was seated at a table onstage with a clear view of the entire room. And the minute I saw that single gesture, I knew exactly how the audience would react.

Later I talked with the speaker (who didn’t realize he’d crossed his arms) and interviewed members of the audience (none of whom recalled the arm movement, but all of whom remembered struggling to come up with a question).

So what happened? How could a simple gesture that none of the participants were even aware of have had such a potent impact? This chapter will answer that question, first by explaining two things: (1) how the human brain processes verbal and nonverbal communication, and (2) how the early origins of body language “wired” us for certain predictable responses. As promised in the introduction, this chapter offers an expanded overview of the importance of body language to leadership success: it will explain why the key to effective body language is to view it through the eye of the beholder; it will help you evaluate your personal “curb appeal”—the first impression people have of you; it will introduce you to the two sets of nonverbal signals that followers look for in leaders. And last but not least, it will alert you to the most common mistakes people make reading your body language.
YOUR THREE BRAINS

Although neuroscience has advanced substantially in recent years, there is still controversy about the precise functions of the various brain structures. So it may be overly simplistic, but helpful, to think of the human brain is as if it were three brains: the ancient reptilian brain, the cortical brain, and the limbic brain.

The reptilian brain, the oldest of the three brain systems, consists of the brain stem and cerebellum. It controls the body’s vital functions, such as heart rate, breathing, body temperature, and balance. Because the reptilian brain is primarily concerned with physical survival, it plays a crucial role in reproduction, social dominance, and establishing and defending territory. The behaviors it generates are instinctive, automatic, and highly resistant to change.

The cortical brain (with its two large cerebral hemispheres) is the newest system of the brain and the seat of our conscious thought. The prefrontal cortex acts as the “executive” for the brain. It handles such activities as language, analysis, and strategizing. We use the cortical brain when organizing our thoughts, setting goals, making plans, and solving complex problems. In the cortical system, the left brain hemisphere controls the right side of the body, and the right brain hemisphere controls the left side of the body. The hemispheres also have different specialties: the left is typically responsible for
The Silent Language of Leaders

language, logic, and math; the right specializes in spatial concepts, music, visual imagery, and facial recognition. The two hemispheres communicate with one another by way of a thick band made up of nerve fibers called the corpus callosum.

The limbic brain is in the middle of the reptilian and cortical brains (both in terms of evolution and physical location). It includes the amygdala, hippocampus, cingulated gyrus, orbital frontal cortex, and insula. The limbic system, in particular the amygdala (an almond-shaped region that is located just in front of the hippocampus), is the first part of the brain to receive emotional information and react to it. As such, the amygdala acts as the “alarm system” for the brain, taking in all incoming stimuli (both physical and psychological) to decide whether or not they are threatening. It tends to become aroused in proportion to the strength of an emotional response—and the arousal to danger comes on faster and with far more intensity than the arousal to a potential reward.

In business, as in our social lives, emotions are the key drivers in decision making. Our logical processes are often only rational justifications for emotional decisions. And because most emotional decisions are made without conscious deliberation, they impact us with the immediacy and power of a limbic-brain imperative—unconsidered, unannounced, and, in most cases, impossible to resist. The limbic brain is most responsible for value judgments (often
Leadership at a Glance

Based on emotional reactions to body language cues) that strongly influence our reactions and behaviors.

It is also the limbic brain that plays the key role in nonverbal communication, in both generating and interpreting body language—a fact that explains why so many body language signals are the same around the world. An employee spots a friend, and immediately her eyebrows raise and her eyes widen in recognition; a team member reacts to distressful news by caving in his upper body and lowering his head; the winner of a conference door prize touches the base of her neck in surprise and delight; an executive’s lips compress when pressured to answer an unwelcome question. All of these nonverbal limbic responses can be seen whether you are in São Paulo, Singapore, or San Francisco.

The triune brain