

## First Impressions and the Power of Non-verbal Communication

In earlier articles we recognised the fundamental part that rapport plays in effective persuasion, and also the huge influence that subconscious communication and thought have on the interpretation of meaning.

When we understand this significance of rapport and subconscious communication we can really appreciate what "first impressions" is all about, and understand its crucial role in our attempts to persuade others.

If we want to establish rapport as a precursory step to selling to a stranger or to addressing an audience at a conference, then this really does mean getting acceptance right from the off! Because how we are actually accepted is a decision that they will begin to make some time ahead of us saying anything much at all. Typically we will have concentrated on creating powerful content for our presentation, and have been frantically rehearsing it in our heads as we walked to the lectern. The reality is that by then we may have already been given the *thumbs down*!

Think about the last time that you opened your front door and found a salesman standing there. Based just on what you see and before he had a chance to explain why he was there a whole series of possible feelings will have kicked off: -surprise, apprehension, irritation, annoyance, even resentment.

Consider as well the much acclaimed expert about to address us at a convention and how she is scrutinized whilst making her way to the lectern. Consciously and unconsciously we interpret what we initially see and hear, providing our own answers to questions about her authority, credibility, empathy, and even self-interest.

These are of course basic instincts which are at play here. If a stranger seems to be intruding into our personal space we will feel threatened. When somebody suggests that they know better than us, then we will question their credentials and motives.

Given the way that behavioural traits follows familiar patterns, we can expect that around 50% of us behave in this questioning way! The other 50% may be more open-minded but half of them are still likely to pick up negative signals, triggering doubts and concerns. The remaining 25% tend to be less questioning, including those wonderful people who trust everybody and want to befriend them!

So with odds against us at roughly 3 to 1 it is clearly worth controlling our nonverbal communication, and creating those right first impressions as a precursor to persuasion.

Most of us recognise the essential nonverbal patterns:

- Initiating eye contact. Not a scary stare, but enough contact to say you can look me in the eye!
- Start with a smile and a nod. Show you're friendly and happy with what you want to talk about
- Stand straight and square. Show confidence in what you have to say.
- Take a half-step back. A subtle way to get out of their space.
- Don't over animate. Avoid sending anxiety signals.
- Show open hands: Show openness and don't wring them with nervousness.

But just doing these body language patterns isn't enough. In fact, when we consciously try to do them, they can tend to work against us. The audience becomes aware of what we're deliberately doing. What we feel we display as positive confidence is actually seen by them

as affected behaviour, even cockiness. What we hope sounds like positive enthusiasm often comes across as insincere exaggeration.

To make these "*non-verbals*" really work they need to register with our audience unconsciously! And that only happens when we do them as a natural expression of how we inwardly feel.

And we do show how we feel! Feel uncertain, unconvinced, or apprehensive and it will show.

Feel certain, confident, on top of your game and that will show.

When we feel right inside we display that quality which we often hear described as *electricity, chemistry, dynamism, charisma, poise, confidence, polish.*

And it is this subtle energy we give out that registers unconsciously, creating acceptance and congruence in our message.

**So to communicate and persuade effectively don't forget to work on the inner self. Establish as habit adopting a positive resourceful, self-believing state - then rely on instinctive subconscious behaviour to do the rest.**

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