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nonverbal communication



# **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING**



**Nonverbal Communication Skills That Build Trust and  
Emotional Well-Being During Social Distancing Conditions**

Humans are **hyper-social creatures** who yearn to **belong**. Psychological safety (where people feel included, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo) is paramount even during conditions of quarantine. When you create and sustain these conditions with individuals you acknowledge their humanity.

The handshake has existed for thousands of years with the hypothesis being that it originated a way to show another person that no weapons were being carried and they were not in danger. It was the way to also seal a deal. The power of a handshake begins with the **power of touch**. Usually considered to be the most primitive and essential form of communication, touch is so powerful and effective that clinical studies at **Mayo Clinic** show that premature babies who are stroked grow 40 percent faster than those who do not receive the same amount of touching.

Through a single handshake, you can instantly become more likable, friendly and memorable. Though it's difficult to replace this information-rich ritual on a teleconference, it is possible to convey a connection to another person through effective nonverbal communication during the virtual visit. Business psychologists affirm that it takes a **minimum of two weeks** before relationships established through **computer-mediated communication** are as **socially grounded** as face-to-face relationships.

The concept of "**social distancing**" is well described and understood by those who have studied and **followed nonverbal communication**. It's referred to a **person's portable "air bubble"** that he carries around with him. The physical space/size of a person's portable bubble is dependent on the density of the population where he grew up. This culturally determined personal zone distance broadcasts to others whether the person is accustomed to crowding or prefers wide open spaces where he can keep his distance from others.

- 1. Personal Distance:** Up to 1 ½ feet; space where we allow only our close ones to step in.
- 2. Professional Distance:** 1-2 feet; space wherein we allow people we know, but who are not very close to enter.
- 3. Social Distance:** 4-7 feet; space we maintain with people we do not know.
- 4. Public Distance:** 7-12 feet; large group presentation.

Social distancing and uncertainty definitely **fuel anxiety**. **Empathy and genuine concern** are the core of establishing good faith and trust. **Trust** is the heart and soul for every human transaction, whether face-to-face contact or virtual contact, it is the conduit for influence. Trust is the medium through which ideas travel. If others **don't trust you**, your ideas are just **dead in the water**. If they trust you, they are receptive and they are excited to hear what you are offering. Having the best idea is worth nothing if people do not trust you.

Since our **body language** is the most **crucial and sound part of our personality**, it can specifically be **used to build trust** with others. Our body language makes our **statements more assertive**, **enriches our messages**, and **reflects our confidence**; all of which work as the **catalyst to build trust**. Body language helps us to express our thoughts with better clarity and aids us in creating a better connection to people. **This connection plants the seed for trust**.

Pressurized conditions, heightened uncertainty and an overall sense of dislocation make it even more difficult for successful interactions. Under quarantine, every aspect of your role is magnified and complicated. We need to **reset expectations** for how work gets done and **adapt our communication** style to a new context.

Here are some **convincing behaviors/practices** that will enable you to **exude trust** and get others wanting to negotiate with you.

1. **Eye Contact**: Above all things, your eyes reflect as the mirror of your self-confidence and help immensely in building trust. Maintaining eye contact **(60%/70% of the time)**, **"listening with your eyes"**, when someone is talking will help build credence because it shows how genuinely you are interested in listening to what they are saying.

Why is eye contact so powerful? It produces the **hormone (oxytocin)** released by the pituitary gland that is responsible for the human behaviors associated with relationships and bonding. It is commonly known as the **"cuddle hormone"** because it is released when people bond socially.

Blinking too much will affect the listener. It seemingly creates an air of being frightened about their words.

2. **EMPLOY YOUR TRIPLE THREAT METHOD** where you correctly and deliberately use your hands, posture and eye contact to show intention and interest during a virtual call or while social distancing yourself from another person. Begin **by matching your body position, movements** and **facial expressions** with those of your talking partner.

3. **Raised Brow:** Your forehead gives significant signals. Raised brows show **engagement, attention, curiosity, and surprise**. Puffed together brows translates the expression of sympathy and concern for someone's troubles. **Disbelief and/or interest** are indicated by one **single brow raise**.
4. **Nodding and Smiling:** When someone is interacting with, let the other person realize that you care for their words and that you are genuinely listening to them. Nodding your head while they are talking and explaining things **shows that you agree** and accept their thoughts and consider their opinions. **Why are two heads nods better than three head nods?**

**Smiling** never wrong and it is in itself a potential weapon in today's life. Your smile can **disarm anyone**, even your enemy. Smiling genuinely will **relax any situation**. Smiling when encouraging people **magnifies your message**. A prolonged, painted-on-your-face smile will make you look fake.

Alert yourself to the congruence between facial expressions and words spoken. Become an expert on the **7 universal basic facial expressions**: **Anger; Contempt; Happiness; Sadness; Fear; Surprise;** and **Disgust**. [www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/ei\\_quiz/take\\_quiz](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/ei_quiz/take_quiz)

5. **Uncross your Arms & Legs:** Do not cross your arms and legs, allow others to feel that you are unbound and opinion free by uncrossing your extremities and disbanding the **"Loser's Position"**. Sit and stand in the **"Winner's Position"**: retain **space between your arms** and **torso**; keep your **shoulders up and back**; place your chin, chest, and forehead straight in front and slightly tilt your **chin up**.

Without ever witnessing it done, a blind athlete enthusiastically raises his arms, lifts his chest and tilts his head upward after winning a race.

Do not point your fingers while interacting, it will make it seem as though you are accusing the person.

6. **Distance & Body Posture:** Maintain an appropriate distance (professional distance or social distance) and a body posture that expresses your interest, your confidence and your firmness. Stand straight, sit up straight, and always face-to-face.

**Physical space can designate power**. Standing too close can feel threatening to the other person.

7. **Pay attention to your tone of voice:** Your tone of voice can give indicators of you feeling rushed or bored. Keep your voice at a **natural pitch**. Also check the sound system on your device. Trust, the critical factor in influencing another person is more readily generated through high-quality, non-staticky, media-rich forms of communication.

Pay close attention to the patterns in the tone of **oral and written communication of others** too. Rate, volume, pitch and inflection of voice communication and physical gestures in video communication can help you identify early if others may need some **additional support**.

8. **Model optimism and concern:** Optimism is contagious. People who demonstrate hopefulness and confidence in the future are better able to help others find meaning and purpose in work, especially during stressful conditions. Be a **highlighter of others**, pass out **“gold stars”** for contributions and awesomeness. Elevate those around you by applying the **power of expectation (Pygmalion Effect:** creating a blueprint that comes to life).

Showing your concern about another and their affairs builds trust. Be attentive, tilt your head forward to show interest.

9. **Maintain a Less-Is-More Movement Attitude During a Video Call:** Too much movement during video conferences can be distracting; it is preferable to **stay seated or stand in one place**. Remember to look at the camera to directly address the audience and keep your hand gestures close to your body so that others can see them.

Research has found that when your audience **sees your face (and most especially your lips)** clearly, they can actually anticipate what you're going to say before you say it, thus **easing up communication**.

10. **Emphasize Likeability and Warmth:** Use the **“similarity-attraction-effect”:** **Birds of a feather flock together.”** Look for **“me too”** instead of pointing out differences. Threads of commonalities or similarities (people, context, interests) help people to bond quicker. You are handicapping your connection whenever you or your client says a version of **“not me.”** The “me too” is similar to receiving a **“heart” or a “like”** on a **Facebook** post.

Be aware that real-life **body language “norms”** still **hold true for virtual conversations** as they do for in-person conversations. Distracting mannerisms and angry facial expressions can all be picked up and exaggerated on camera.

11. **Display Peaceful Intentions:** Greeting people with **a namaste**, or just the **slight bow** that goes with it are perfectly advisable now. The idea in warm greetings is to show peaceful intentions. A simple nod and smile, from the proper distance, is always sufficient when greeting someone during this social distancing period. Do you **lift your chin or lower your chin** when you greet someone from 6 feet away?

The **greatest gift** we can give people we encounter is to help them feel that **they belong** and that they are accepted for who they are. Why is belonging important? **Abraham Maslow's** classic hierarchy of needs theorized that all people have 5 basic needs that must be met in order to thrive: **Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem, Self-actualization**. Notice that after our basic food and shelter requirements, our **top 3 needs** become **dependent** on **nourishment from our relationships**. Every single interaction is an opportunity to understand more about yourself and the people you are with.

TV host and entrepreneur **Oprah Winfrey** quotes: "There's one desire we all share: we all want to feel valued. Each of us at the core, longs to be loved, needed, understood, affirmed; to have intimate connections that leave us feeling more alive and human."

#### **CHALLENGES:**

1. Next time you are speaking with someone, try **finding three commonalities** in the first 5 minutes.
2. Test your Emotional Intelligence by completing the facial recognition quiz on: [www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/ei\\_quiz/take\\_quiz](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/ei_quiz/take_quiz)
3. Look for the 7 micro-expressions (Universal Facial Expressions) as you listen.
4. Attempt a one-day "Vow of Silence" in your attempt to be a better listener.
5. Practice engaging in 60 to 70 percent eye contact during your interactions.



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