

Strengthening Non-Verbal Impact

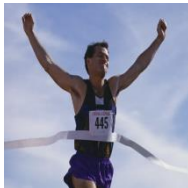
Eye-Contact

Focus on a person's eye 'area', i.e. the 'triangle' across the eyes and down towards the tip of their nose. Anything above the eyebrows can give the impression of being aloof or arrogant. Any lower than the tip of their nose, then beware, it is their 'intimate' zone, and in business circles this may best be described as 'shifty'.

To maximise engagement with people in meetings, and to 'read' them better, keep your focus on them as individuals. Look at each person in the room for 2-3 seconds at a time - that's enough to show inclusion but not so much that they will feel stared at. Keep this natural – don't robotically pan around the room back and forth! Effective eye-contact will also help you to naturally focus and project your voice.

'Power Pose'

Social psychologist, Amy Cuddy, has done a lot of research into this area. She has found that adopting high power body language can significantly increase our confidence in challenging situations by increasing our testosterone levels (the power and confidence hormone) and reducing cortisol (the stress hormone).



Think about the pose of an athlete crossing the line first in the Olympics! This is an example of a 'gravity defying' behaviour. People naturally do this when they are happy and feeling comfortable. These gestures motion upwards and outwards.



Powerful people do the same. They take up maximum space. Amy Cuddy talks about the 'Power Pose' – or the 'Wonder Woman' stance. Try it (before!) you go into a situation to open up your body, so generating more testosterone, leading to an increase in confidence.

Posture

Practise standing with your feet hip width apart – this is your most balanced position when standing still.

Keep your weight slightly forward (about 55%) so that you are standing on the balls of your feet. Test this out by rising onto your toes. If you need to shift your weight forward in order to do this, then you are leaning slightly too far back on your heels (and this can both look and feel like you are on the 'back foot' if being challenged). The idea is that you are alert and ready.

Use of Hands

How to best use our hands is often the area people feel most unsure about. Here are some guidelines that might help:

A neutral 'resting' position is to bring your arms to the front of your body, just above your waist, and to place the back of one hand onto the palm of the other. Never behind your back...



When you want to make a point, be bold and deliberate with your gestures. Let your hand(s) gesture above your waist, and away from your body, bringing them back down again to your side or to the neutral resting position once the point has been made.

When you have an important point that you want people to hear and remember, then use your hands in a downward motion. This can be done either with palms facing down or with your hands at an angle with palms facing each other. You can use one or both hands.



When you want to seek a viewpoint, ask a question or to show support as you listen, then your hands, either one or both, should have the palms facing upwards, moving outwards towards the person.



Effective Breathing

When stress triggers the body's fight- or- flight response, breathing becomes quick and shallow. Too much carbon dioxide is removed from the blood, which then loses its proper acidity. This affects the nerves and muscles, prompting symptoms such as faintness and palpitations.

Slow, abdominal breathing helps to calm the body and mind and 'turn off' the fight-or flight response.

Learn how to breathe better by lying on your back with your knees raised on a cushion. To make sure you breathe using your diaphragm (instead of taking shallow breaths from your upper chest), raise your arms and tuck your hands behind your head. This suppresses the movement of your upper chest and forces your diaphragm into action.

Practise breathing nasally. Not only do the tiny hairs in our nose filter out pollutants in the air, our nasal cavity is much smaller than our mouth, and therefore air is pushed deeper into our diaphragm - it's called the Venturi Effect!

Try slowing and calming your breath, either while at your desk or when moving around. Relax your shoulders, close your mouth, and rest one hand on your stomach – if you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your abdomen, you know you're breathing correctly.

- Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, and then breathe out through your nose for a count of four, or more if you are able, releasing the air slowly.
- Pause after each 'out breath' – there's no set amount of time for this pause, as everyone is different. Simply wait until your body tells you it's time to take another breath. With practice, this pause will naturally lengthen.