

How to Connect with People

Now let's talk about how great persuaders connect with people—what they actually do. Research at the Persuasion Institute sheds light on critical factors that are present when the audience feels the greatest connection with their persuader. Review the list below and see if you can add any of these items to your persuasion repertoire.

- You hold no preconceived judgments or expectations.
- You are positive and upbeat, both up front and throughout the encounter.
- It is clear that you are there to serve, assist, and help.
- You are respectful.
- Your body language is open and friendly (eye contact, gestures, smile, etc.).
- Your tone of voice is warm and friendly.
- Your use of language and word choice is thoughtful.
- You speak in a natural, relaxed manner but still maintain energy and enthusiasm.
- You instill in your audience both hope and optimism.
- Your demeanor is always comfortable and genuine; it's never artificial.

There is a lot of talk about body language and other nonverbal communication. Does it really make a difference? It absolutely does. Every single gesture you make either attracts or repels your audience. Nothing is neutral. If there is a way to enhance your persuasiveness and help your audience feel more comfortable connecting to you, why not use it? Albert Mehrabian, an expert in the understanding of communication, delineates three different ways in which we are perceived:

1. Visually—body language, appearance—55 percent.
2. Vocally—the tone in which our words are delivered—38 percent.
3. Verbally—the actual spoken words themselves—7 percent.

As you can see, our visual self-representation, including body language, is a big player in determining how we will be perceived by others. Most studies show that the majority of our communication is nonverbal, and that people often place more stock in

our nonverbal communication than in our words (hence the saying, “Actions speak louder than words”). Most of us are simply unaware of the potency of our nonverbal communication. We don’t realize the treasure trove of possibilities it offers. Did you know that the facial muscles can produce over 250,000 different expressions?⁹ And even if we did realize these things, knowing how to utilize the information is another story entirely.

Have you ever seen yourself on video and found it to be an unpleasant experience? Most persuaders are unaware of their nonverbal behavior. A powerful way to raise your awareness is to practice in front of a mirror, or better yet, record yourself. Stepping into the audience’s shoes and watching yourself from the other side of the fence will teach you far more than any other method.

Being well versed in body language is not only important to how you come across as a persuader, but it also helps you detect when your audience is lying. That’s because it’s very difficult for someone to control all their nonverbal communication when they are being deceitful. A brief list of some deceptive red flags includes the following:

- Forced eye contact.
- Irregular eye contact.
- Hesitation.
- Irregular speech.
- Touching the face.
- Increased vocal fillers.

Accomplished persuaders understand nonverbal behavior. This understanding will help you make sense of your audience’s interest or buying signals. Are they ready to go or are they still resisting you and your message? The studies show, and great persuaders know, that facial expressions, increased mirroring, changes in the eyes, and specific questions asked all dictate that your audience is being persuaded or ready to buy. Spend the time to master the skill of recognizing these signals. This is critical to great

persuasion. Your audience is telling you they are ready to go. Are you listening or still droning on?

You will best connect, and therefore best persuade, when you can effectively identify the feelings and emotions of your audience. We carry our psychology in and on our bodies; whether we like it or not, our bodies reflect what's going on inside of us. Being able to discern the psychological and emotional state of your audience by observation helps you know what to say and do next. Their nonverbal communication helps you know how to adjust, monitor, and enhance the persuasive cycle.

The simple act of shaking someone's hand is paramount. Sometimes this is your only physical contact with your audience, and it is a common sign of respect. It can communicate strength, weakness, indifference, warmth, concern, or even disrespect. Your audience will pick up on and judge all aspects of your handshake. They are judging you on:

- Amount of eye contact.
- Grip firmness.
- Duration of grip.
- Type of grip.
- Degree of wetness/dryness of hands.
- Depth of interlock.
- Posture.
- Use of other hand.

We can decode a nonverbal message at great speed with incredible accuracy. Nonverbal communication is decoded in our brain's limbic system, where genuine emotional expressions and responses are controlled. These activities are all part of our subconscious mind. As such, our nonverbal communication communicates our emotional state, our feelings, and even our tension. Remember that 95 percent of all persuasion is

subconscious. We just feel it. The same tendency holds true for nonverbal communication: it is just something we sense.

How do we pick up trust, tension, uneasiness, or even fear? Our feelings and reactions to nonverbal communication usually fall below the radar, and they typically take place in an instant. Microexpressions cross your face in a fleeting instant, lasting less than a few tenths of a second. These expressions appear instantaneously in response to an emotionally provoking event and are next to impossible to suppress. They reveal one's true emotion or feeling.¹¹ It is also interesting to note that if you can get someone to mimic or configure their faces to resemble a specific emotion, they will experience that feeling. Studies show that these changes in facial expressions also correspond with precise changes in physiological activity resembling the real emotion or feeling.

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