

Touch and Influence

Touch is another powerful part of body language – important enough to devote a whole section to it alone. Touch can be a very effective psychological technique. Subconsciously, we like to be touched; it makes us feel appreciated and liked. It is true, though, that we do need to be aware and careful of a small percentage of the population who dislikes being touched in any way. In most instances, however, touch can help put people at ease and make them more receptive to you and your ideas.

Touch can create a positive perception in the person being touched. Touch carries with it favorable interpretations of immediacy, affection, similarity, relaxation, and informality. In one research study, librarians did one of two things when handing back library cards to university students checking out books: Either they did not touch the person at all during the exchange or they made light, physical contact by placing a hand over the student's palm. Invariably, those students who were touched during the transaction rated the library service more favorably than those who were not touched at all. Waiters/Waitresses who touched customers on the arm when asking if "everything is okay" received larger tips and were evaluated more favorably than those waiters who didn't touch their customers. Attractive waitresses who touched their customers received the highest tips of all! Touch also induces customers to spend more time shopping in a particular store. In one particular study, physical contact on the part of the salespeople induced customers to buy more and to evaluate the store more favorably.

In another example, touch was found to increase the number of people who volunteered to score papers, sign petitions, and return money that had been left in a telephone booth. Hornick discovered that touching bookstore customers on the arm caused them to shop longer (to be exact, 22.11 minutes versus 13.56 minutes), to purchase more (\$15.03 versus \$12.23), and to evaluate the store more positively than customers who had not been touched. Hornick also found that supermarket customers who had been touched were more likely to taste and purchase food samples than non-touched customers.

We know that certain areas of the body can be freely touched while other areas are off limits. Women have more leniencies with other women and men. Men usually don't mind being touched by an unfamiliar female – but things get harder to predict in cases where men are touching other men. In general, men don't like being touched by unfamiliar members of the same sex. Safe areas of contact include the shoulders, forearms and hands, and sometimes the upper back. This all depends on the situation and relationship between the two parties prior to the touch.