

## Communication Skills: Lecture No. 9

### Module 3

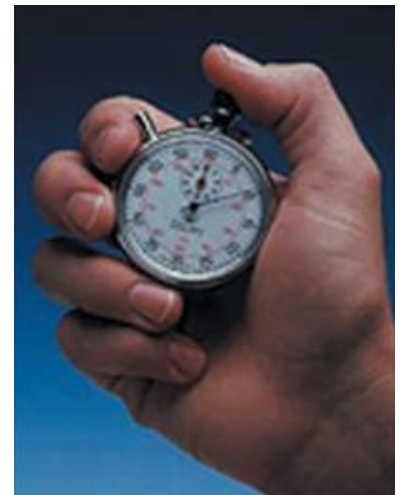
#### Lecture 5

## Nonverbal Communication

In the previous lectures of this module, I have been talking about the importance of nonverbal communication with special emphasis on body language. I discussed the origin of nonverbal communication, and in this context, the nature-nurture debate, and then I proceeded to explain the various types of nonverbal communication. In this concluding part, I will begin with a discussion on **chronemics**, **olfactics**, **paralinguistics**, and then throw light on some of the limitations of using body language and end this module by giving you tips on how to enhance your professional image by improving your nonverbal communication skills.

### CHRONEMICS

**Chronemics** is the study of the way we structure and use time. Using time implies the meaning we attach to it. The way we value time will be reflected in our nonverbal communication in terms of spending time, wasting time, postponing time, minimal use of time, maximum use of time, etc. The time perception that is associated with our nonverbal behaviour is what we call us “chronemics.” People arrive early or late depending on their inherent sense of time. The one who arrives in time is generally sincere to work and values time and appointments. The one who arrives late may not be insincere to work, but s/he may not value committing to timely appointments seriously. Moreover, there are high-status individuals, such as doctors or politicians, who may deliberately arrive late to assert their importance to the waiting people.



The time taken for an event is also quite symbolic. The release of big-budget movies coincides with important festivals and major holidays. In interviews, more time is spent for candidates that the panel members are interested in. In offices, higher authorities choose to whom they should give more time, and to whom they should not be giving any time at all. There are bosses who give approval to requests of some people immediately than to those of others. Most of our nonverbal behavior with regard to time emanates from our time perception, which is either monochronic or polychronic.



## MONOCHRONIC PERSPECTIVE OF TIME



In monochronic perspective, time is seen in a linear fashion as if it is a single compartmentalized unit. It is a scarce resource and hence it is budgeted, rationed and controlled. People who have monochronic perception of time, literally believe that time is gold and time is life. Success is associated with how better you are able to plan and utilize time. Americans generally have a monochronic perspective of time. That is why they emphasize schedules, appointments, segmentation, planning, managing, and promptness. They do one thing at a time and concentrate fully on the job at hand. They do not appreciate unsolicited visitors and unplanned activities. Similarly, they do not easily pardon late arrivals.

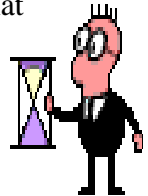
## POLYCHRONIC PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

In polychronic perspective, time is flexible. Time is not compartmentalized and people with this perception are on auto-pilot mode and handle their life as it comes. They use time in a flexible manner for the maintenance of harmonious relationships. In the Middle East, Latin America, and most parts of the South Asia, the general perception about time is polychronic. People with polychronic perception enjoy handling multiple tasks. They like to do several things at the same time. They are highly distractible, and they do not bother about getting distracted frequently. In fact, some



of them welcome it and they think it adds to the spontaneity of life and human relationships. They treat time commitments casually and do not keep their appointments in a timely fashion.

What is significant from the point of view of professional communication is that knowing the individual's perception of time helps in minimizing miscommunication. If a boss with polychronic perspective fixes an appointment, one should be prepared for delay or even cancellation. Conversely, if a boss with monochronic perspective fixes an appointment, it will be wise on the part of the employee to reach the venue before time. While in the former case, the boss will be happy if you even intrude into his office without an appointment, in the latter, the boss will frown at you and be rude to you.



## PROS AND CONS

Both of these time perspectives have their own merits and demerits. There are certain jobs which we need to pay full attention and finish it immediately before we go to the next one, which suits a monochronic time perspective. However, there are certain other jobs which actually need a flexible time frame (for example, most of the creative jobs) and a polychronic time perception will do justice to them. A judicious use of time according to these perceptions can help in executing jobs without conflicts. It is important that you modify your own perception of time according to the expectation in the work environment to ensure successful business communication.



## OLFACTICS

Olfactics is the study of nonverbal communication through scent and smell. Although this is a much neglected aspect of body language, it is nonetheless important because people give a lot of psychological significance to the way they smell and get attracted to those whose fragrance appeal to them. That is why, in developed countries, people spend billions of dollars on scent. In America, for instance, many people daily use scent, cologne, deodorant, aftershave apart from a lot of antiseptics and sanitizers. Body odors, especially with bad smell, repel people. Many consider bad smell from mouth or armpits as unsophisticated and uncivilized. In terms of memory, of all the senses, the images linked with odor lasts for a long time. There are many instances where adults remember the fragrance of their childhood girlfriends, be it emanating from hair or entire body. What is important for communication is that scent and smell can be used effectively to create a good nonverbal impression. Often, the perfume that one uses in critical situations like job interviews can make or mar one's career. A busy panel of experts smelt pungent jasmine fragrance before the entry of the interviewee. All of them expected an attractive and dainty girl to appear. But when a clumsy boy entered, the experts immediately noted the incongruity in the personal appearance of the candidate. A male using a female scent? Needless to say that the candidate was rejected by the panel despite the boy's excellent academic credentials.

## PARALINGUISTICS

When we talk about *verbal* communication, generally we think of human speech transmitted in the form of linguistic communication. However, we do not pay much attention to the paralinguistic or meta communicative aspect of it. Paralinguistics or vocalic refers to the study of the nonverbal elements of the voice. This includes vocal qualities such as pitch, rhythm, tempo, resonance, control, and pace. In addition to these qualities, the study of vocalic examines purely nonverbal elements as screaming, yelling, sighing, laughing, crying and vocal segregates as “ah,” and “um.”

Whether the voice is vibrant, thick or flat indicates the confidence level of the speaker. Similarly, no two intonations are alike. Which means that the person stressing on a particular syllable will differ from another depending on the way s/he is brought up. Similarly, the rhythm and accent used by a speaker will reveal the speech-community s/he hails from. The way a person pronounces and chooses words (vocabulary) gives style to his/her speech.

## INTERPRETING NONVERBAL CUES

Albert Mehrabian identified three primary dimensions for interpreting nonverbal cues, namely, **Immediacy**, **Arousal** and **Dominance**.

By **Immediacy**, he meant the nonverbal cues we use to communicate our *liking* and *pleasure*. We gravitate towards people whom we like and avoid or move away from those we dislike. Our decision to like someone is usually unconscious and instinctual. Nonetheless, we will soon find our reasons to support our attraction for someone.

By **Arousal**, Mehrabian did not mean sexual arousal but something like animated liveliness. He says that if we are interested in a person then we tend to be more animated. We become lively, we become fully alive and respond favorably.

Finally, by **Dominance**, Mehrabian indicated the balance of power in human relationships. Understanding the power-balance is significant in various human bindings such as boss and worker or husband and wife. By observing the power balance, you can get information about status and position. High-status people have relaxed body posture, and sit on the chair in a very relaxed manner.

In addition, Mehrabian indicated that one should always look for **Context**, **Cluster** and **Change** in terms of nonverbal cues before attributing meaning to them. Environment plays a crucial role in determining the context of a communicative situation. For example, a beautiful girl enters the auditorium and spots for her a seat next to a boy in the middle row though there are many other vacant seats on the side rows. The boy should not jump into the conclusion (using proxemics) that the girl is attracted towards him because she chose to sit close to him. In reality, the girl did not want to sit close to the air-conditioning vents as she was suffering from cold and chose a seat in the centre. It was a sheer coincidence that the boy sat in the middle-row where a seat was also vacant for her.

Hence, looking at a **cluster** of nonverbal cues helps in making an error free judgment. For instance, a child trying to tell a lie will put its hand over the mouth, might sweat, and avoid eye contact. Moreover, observing **change** in the behaviour such as avoiding hand shake (when every day the person gives a hand shake) can help in making an accurate reading of nonverbal cues.

The main point in studying nonverbal cues is that you should not apply one piece of information as meaning everything. You must carefully observe possible factors in the

surroundings that may be contributing to the other person's movements including things like temperature, climate and weather.

## HOW DO WE CONTROL OUR BODY LANGUAGE?

Although our nonverbal behaviour reveals our inner feelings, it is really possible to exercise control over the negative nonverbal cues. The best way to control body language is to be aware of it. So what do you do? Record your own pictures and take help in analyzing them. Identify what looks negative and keep that in mind when you are put in situations where you may repeat the negative behaviour. Your conscious awareness will certainly help you control negative nonverbal behaviour.

Moreover, like an actor, you should train yourself to express emotions with your body in a proper manner. You can do this by emulating the gestures of people who have positive body language. A positive body language includes smile, open posture, forward lean, appropriate touch, eye contact, gestures and nods.

## COMPETENT COMMUNICATORS

Now, coming to the final question, how does one become a **competent communicator**? The simple answer is by carefully observing and constantly emulating the body language of competent communicators. How to identify competent communicators? Competent communicators are good at monitoring their nonverbal messages and messages from others. They develop a wide range of nonverbal behaviors to use in different situations. They spontaneously gather nonverbal cues from their surrounding and infer meanings by clustering them and by looking for any change in behaviour pattern.

Before I conclude this module, can you take a quick look at the picture below and (based on the nonverbal cues) identify who is more interested in the ongoing transaction.



You are right if you identified that the woman is more interested in exchanging her commodity with the man. You could have noted such nonverbal cues as her hair in the front, her leaning forward, and hand in the front offering something (as against the man's hands turned to back).

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