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COMM 305

## **EIGHT GUIDELINES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE**

Old Dominion University

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First impressions make a remarkable impact on how a person views another. If broken down further, it is actually the nonverbal cues of that first impression that really makes the difference. According to Patti Wood, a body language expert, “In some studies, nonverbal communication has been shown to carry between 65% and 93% more impact than the actual words spoken, especially when the message involves emotional meaning and attitudes.” She goes on to say that up to 10,000 nonverbal cues can be exchanged in less than one minute during a conversation between two people. That being said, there is no first impression more important than a professional job interview. Below, is a compiled list of guidelines describing the eight most pertinent nonverbal communication cues to be mindful of when going on a job interview.

***Rule One: Dress for the Job You Want***

When you internalize your goals (Green 2013), or ‘manifest your destiny’ as some put it, you are being knowledgeable of the fact that you are serious about your future and that sincerity should carry over into your overall appearance. If you truly want to advance in your career then it is necessary to show your superiors that you are dedicated. It is very important that the interviewer can physically see you as a proper and professional candidate for that position. Dressing for the job you want is most certainly talking about the clothes you wear but it is also much more. To dress properly for success also means that it is important to wear a smile, and maintain a positive, welcoming demeanor. You essentially need to appear as the whole package when considering first impressions and it will make it that much harder for someone to look you over for a potential opportunity.

Workplace attire is of the utmost importance in a professional setting and this is because of the fact that dressing like a professional actually can increase the level of

professionalism within that setting. The way you dress inadvertently goes towards or against your credibility in the professional world. According to the text, clothing is a “nonverbal status symbol” in which darker colors tend to signal a higher authority or importance of position.

“People use your clothing and appearance to determine your status, credibility, and persuasiveness (Benson et al., 1975; Kapp & Hall, 2002; Michelson, 1993; via Hamilton, 2011).”

Credibility is concept that is not only important for you to set an example of at this interview but to maintain that integrity bar throughout your professional career. The way you dress for your interview must be professionally appropriate because it could make or break your interview.

### ***Rule Two: On Time is Late***

When arriving for a job interview, it is advised that you show up 10-15 minutes prior to your meeting. This is to ensure that you have found the correct place, and to give you those last couple minutes to relax or go over any key points you wish to remember, that way you are completely prepared for the interview. “It will also give you time to calm your nerves, have a drink of water and go to the bathroom if necessary (The Undercover Recruiter). The saying “Early is on time and on time is late” is a popular attempt to try and change the mentality of arriving on time for work.

Once again, your first impression is everything and if you bust through the door right a 9 am for your interview, it’s going to come across that you are unprepared or that you have a negligent mind set in regard to the company and this job offer. “The consequences of arriving late for an appointment often depend on whether you are meeting someone of equal rank, someone more important, or someone less important (Richmond and McCrosky 2003; via Hamilton 2011).” Keeping this in mind, remember that during an interview you are *always*

going to be meeting someone of higher rank than yourself and that they will be judging you on ‘little’ things such as your timeliness when arriving at your interview. If you arrive late it could easily come across as disrespectful to your potential employer. This is further supported by the fact that the United States is commonly referred to as a monochronic culture, meaning that we view time as a scarce resource and in order to prevent wasting time, we follow a strict set of schedules, appointments, and itineraries (Hamilton 2011).

### ***Rule Three: Use Eye Contact***

Using eye contact is rule number three because it is one of the most important nonverbal cues to be mindful of in an interview. According to the text, people having a conversation generally make eye contact for 31% of the time and the average duration of mutual gaze time is approximately 1.18 seconds. This may not seem like a big deal because it is only for one second at a time, but mastering the concept of proper eye contact can reassure your interviewer that you are present, alert, listening, and competent on the conversation matter. Hamilton says that the proper amount of eye contact can show interest and attentiveness, a willingness to participate, and can even persuade others. During an interview it is your ultimate job to persuade your potential employer to believe that you are the best choice for the position, eye contact will go a long way to enhancing that cause.

While learning that eye contact is helpful, it is also necessary to understand eye contact within other cultures. It is likely that you will have to converse with people from different cultures, therefore, knowing their body language can help prevent someone from perceiving something in the wrong way. “Assuming that you and another person have identical frames of reference usually leads to misunderstanding (Hamilton 2011).” Be mindful of how much eye

contact the sender is giving you, encouraging you to use the same level of contact as them and can prevent a misinterpretation.

#### ***Rule Four: Display Confidence***

From the words of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, confidence is defined as “a feeling or belief that you can do something well of succeed at something.” People that tend to be very comfortable with their abilities or are self-assured generally display a healthy amount of confidence, however, can mean different things to different people. Someone may feel they are being confident while others may perceive them as being ‘cocky’ or pompous. This could also swing in the opposite direction. One may feel they are being confident and the other party may feel they are not as confident as they should be. There is a fine line between being timid, confident, or arrogant. The intermediate distribution hypothesis is true in ecology, but can also be metaphorically used in this situation; a space right in the middle is the most beneficial.

Confidence is generally noticed very quickly upon interacting with another party. “People judge you the moment you walk in the room. If we get rid of social niceties and get down to the science, attraction happens in the first 30 seconds (Van Andrews).” This reference article is speaking mostly about relationships, but the raw message is still there. Your potential employer will (unintentionally) judge whether or not you are a good candidate for this position within the first 30 seconds of meeting you. Displaying a proper amount of confidence is a sure way to get you noticed, and more importantly, make a lasting impression.

#### ***Rule Five: Be Mindful of Your Posture and Body Language***

Being aware of your body language works collectively and concurrently with Rule Four: Display Confidence. Some may argue that confidence is an internal sentiment that is depicted solely by whether you do or do not have confidence in yourself. That is not necessarily true. The fact that confidence is easily displayed or recognized by body language is a very important rule to consider when going for a job interview. Confidence is the actual trait being expressed, while your body language is merely the vector for that expression. “For example, poor posture during an interview may be misinterpreted as disrespect, lack of enthusiasm, for indicative of poor behavior (Hamilton 2011).” With that being said, even if you do not actually feel confident in yourself or your skills for this interview, the least you can do is act like it. Displaying a positive and open posture can “help you develop positive business relationships, influence and motivate the people who report to you, improve productivity, bond with members of your team, and present your ideas with more impact (Goman 2013).”

According to Goman, Author of *12 Body Language Tips for Career Success* in Forbes Magazine, a couple different strategies can be used to produce a positive and credible impression. Some of these include: smiling, standing up tall to take up more space to add a somewhat assertiveness to your behavior, lowering your vocal pitch to sound less nervous and more powerful, using open gestures to increase your candor, as well as talking with your hands. “Brain imaging has shown that a region called Broca’s area, which is important for speech production, is active not only when we’re talking, but also when we wave our hands. Since gesture is integrally linked to speech, gesturing as you talk can actually power up your thinking (Goman 2013).” As a career candidate, you can “improve your communication techniques by monitoring your conscious and unconscious and gestures (Hamilton 2011).”

***Rule Six: Be Mindful of Another’s Personal Space***

The importance of personal space is something that most don't think much about until theirs' is invaded by another. Personal space also varies from culture to culture. Understanding the common social rules of other cultures may make it easier to accept or even acknowledge when presented with a relevant situation. "Knowledge of these distance differences is important to your business or professional success (Hamilton 2011)." Such applicable situations arise in an interview setting.

Personal reactions to distance are commonly broken into four categories: (1) intimate distance (0-18 inches apart), most commonly used by close friends or loved ones, (2) personal distance (18 inches – 4 feet apart), used by close friends or colleagues, (3) social distance (4 – 12 feet apart), commonly used in business transactions, and finally (4) public distance (12 or more feet apart), generally maintained between a speaker and an audience (Hall 1973; via Hamilton 2011).

Normally for an interview, it is likely that you will be within the 'social distance' from one another which gives a somewhat personal feeling but remains professional because everyone has an adequate amount of personal space. It can, however, depend on the interview itself. Some interviews require one-on-one conversation delegating a more personal feel, or a group setting with multiple interviewers that could constitute a more social or public distance. Regardless of what kind of interview you will be attending, it is helpful to familiarize yourself with the acceptable distances. This, in turn, will decrease your chances of invading someone's personal space.

***Rule Seven: Always Initiate a Firm Handshake***

In a professional interview, the one thing that you will most certainly do before and after your interview is shake the hand(s) of the person/persons conducting the interview. There are many different ways in which you can shake hands but “overall, a firm handshake known as the Continental Grab makes the best impression in the United States for both men and women (Chaplin et al. 2000; via Hamilton 2011).” For comparison, the other common ways people generally shake hands is the ‘early’ or ‘dainty’ grab, or the overly-confident grab. “Even weak or overly strong handshakes will be given some significance by many people (Hamilton 2011).”

The early grab is generally done as a mistake or towards a female at attempt show femininity (by that female) or acknowledge another’s femininity (from a male to a female). While an honest attempt, it is completely and socially unacceptable in this day in age to treat females and males differently in a professional setting, even if it is just a handshake. The other common way, the overly-confident grab is done when people feel the need to grab your ‘already connected hands’ with the free hand. Some may feel that this is more of a reassuring handshake; however the majority of people will find it disrespectful. Therefore, when trying to make a lasting impression, the importance of carrying out the continental handshake should never be looked over.

### ***Rule Eight: Be Mindful of your Diction***

According to Hamilton, nonverbal communication is defined as “all intentional and unintentional messages that are not written, spoken, or sounded.” However, many texts include paralanguage, or vocal sounds, as part of the nonverbal communication definition as well. For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to include paralanguage and diction into the nonverbal



communication equation because of the fact that the way you say things can affect how people understand your views and opinions.

In an interview setting, your diction can set you apart from other candidates. It is not necessarily what you say that can damage or boost your credibility, but it likely could be the way you've said it. Speaking loudly, clearly and without many vocal stumbles can lead people to believe that you know what you are talking about and you are comfortable and confident with the material, which in turn can support your credibility and authority. The opposite is true for people that speak quietly, mumble, or show a lack of enthusiasm.

Interestingly, “during speech perception, our brains integrate information from our ears with that from our eyes. Because this integration happens early in the perceptual process, visual cues influence what we think we are hearing. That is, what we see can actually shape what we ‘hear,’ (Groeger 2012).” In other words, how you say things, in addition to your mannerisms, can actually be interpreted in an unintentional way based on the receiver. This involuntary neurological process makes it that much more important to focus your attention on your paralanguage and making sure that you come across in a concise and clear way.

Throughout this paper, eight of the most pertinent rules and guidelines of nonverbal communication have been presented in relation to professional interviews. The success of an interview could be solely based on the nonverbal interaction between the interviewee and interviewer(s) “The message that counts is the one received (Hamilton 2011).” In order to ensure that your intended message has been received properly, simply follows these eight guidelines of a nonverbal interview.

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