

The careerist

'There are times when you should let emotions show'

How to make body language work

The majority of communication is non-verbal. But how do you make sure your workplace body language is correct?

How important is body language?

"We're very influenced by non-verbal communication," says Joe Navarro, author of *What Every Body is Saying: An ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Speed-reading People*. If you look at presidential debates, the body language of the candidates is often what people recall most. "They remember their mannerisms and how they looked. In the workplace, lack of social intelligence is what keeps a lot of people from climbing the ladder," he says.

Elizabeth Kuhnke, an executive coach and body language expert, says: "It is a very important part of relationship building. Establish that rapport and people will follow your lead; you control the emotional agenda."

What are some of the basics?

"The real tip is to convey confidence," says Ben Williams, a corporate psychologist. "Think back to the times when you've been successful and felt good when you want to project confidence." General tips, Mr Williams explains, include standing up straight, smooth gestures, nodding and smiling without being obsequious and keeping your hands below your elbows. You should also be aware of your tics such as fiddling with jewellery, pens and hair, and practice not doing them as they can be very distracting and undermine your message.

The same is true of some natural emotional responses, says Ms Kuhnke. "If you feel moist

eyed, look up towards where the wall and the ceiling meet. It will make you appear thoughtful. If you think you're about to explode, breathe deeply and take the air right down. It slows you down. Being emotionally controlled is a matter of practice and awareness."

However, says Mr Navarro, keeping your real feelings on a short leash is not always desirable. "There are times when you should let emotions show. Leaders should be seen to be empathetic, especially when times are difficult." Finally, he adds, it is not just what you do, it's how fast you do it. "If you go to see people quickly when you enter a room, it multiplies positive feelings."

What about other people's body language?

"You need to be aware and read people," says Ms Kuhnke. "If they're flushing, then something you've said has affected them deeply. Open eyes are a 'tell me more' expression."

Mr Williams says that you have to be a bit careful about ascribing exact meanings to single gestures. "Touching your nose can mean you're telling a lie or it can mean that your nose is itching."

Rather, says Ms Kuhnke, you want to watch out for clusters of gestures: "Arms crossed, peering over glasses and thinned lips probably means someone is closed off."

Mr Navarro says that good, empathetic leaders will act on body language. "If you're in a meeting and you see uncomfortable behaviour, such as wringing of hands, ask people if everything is all right, rather than just ploughing on."

Rhymer Rigby