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How to Tell What They Really Meant

By Susan Dunn

How to Tell What They Really Meant by Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach

Part of Emotional Intelligence is understanding the emotions of others, and one of the most important channels we use to communicate emotions is nonverbal communication.

When we're engaged in communication, we must pay attention to all sorts of things besides just the actual words. No matter how we try to define words, they still mean one thing to one person, and another to another.

To understand this, all you need to do is take a sentence and emphasize different things, or use a different tone of voice. For instance, try saying this sentence 5 different times, each time emphasizing a different word: "I know what he said." The emphasis makes quite a difference.

Now consider that what "he" said was, "I love you." How would you say "I know what he said"? Certainly with tenderness, love, and maybe even awe.

However, if the person who said "I love you" was someone you despised, you would say "I know what he said" with resignation, or pity, or maybe even disdain.

Now consider what "he" said was that you were the one solely responsible for the demise of the project. How would you say, "I know what he said"? Agitated, and there's a big "but" about to follow.

Included in nonverbal communication are tone of voice, pace, posture, proximity (how close the person is to you), gestures, facial expressions, and movements (small and large). All ways of communicating besides language.

Nonverbal communication is important because it is less under our conscious control than the words we speak. Therefore it tends to reveal our emotions, whether we intend to or not. After all, there are times when we wouldn't want someone to know how we "really" felt.

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With practice you can learn to modulate a good bit of your nonverbal communication, but not all of it. For instance, there's something called "the Adam's apple jump" that remains involuntary. According to The Nonverbal Dictionary©, this jump of the cartilage in the throat is "an unconscious sign of emotional anxiety, embarrassment, or stress." It means the man doesn't like what's going on, or strongly disagrees.

The expansion and contraction of the pupil's in our eyes is another example of something that's very hard to control. Our pupils expand when we like something ("let more of this in") and contract when we do not ("I don't want to see this"). We do this in response to sunlight, but also to emotional things.

So how do you interpret what's going on? The first step is to notice change. If the person's been sitting in a certain position for quite a while and then shifts dramatically, something has happened you need to take note of. However, here's the tricky part. It could be they think you're lying, it could be they got a

cramp in their leg, it could be they love what you're saying and wanted to move closer (unconsciously), it could be they have to go to the bathroom, it could be something you said angered them.

Someone told me the other day how much they liked doing phone work. I agreed with her, saying that it filtered out a lot of distractions. "Yeah," she said, "all those things I'm imagining that aren't really going on."

So how do we quit imagining and figure out what the nonverbal message meant? It takes practice. You begin with self-awareness - noticing your own nonverbal reactions. Start paying attention to the things YOU do in the course of communicating. Notice when you move, when you change your facial expression, what you do with your hands. Then hook it up with what was going on, to explain why you do these things.

Next, start observing more in others. Facial expressions and gestures can be tricky, especially if you're in a multicultural situation. A sign of peace in one country is a gross obscenity in another. Some cultures are more facially expressive than others. A smile can mean "I agree" in one country, while in another country, direct disagreeing isn't permitted, so a smile is just a convention.

You can study nonverbal expressions through photographs by accessing some of the sites on the Internet.

Then start asking more questions when it's appropriate. And it may always be appropriate as far as that goes. As my friend said ... we imagine. Nobody likes to feel like you're "mind-reading," and the more important the conversation, the more important that you check out what you think the other person meant, or said, or implied. When we assume, we can get into trouble.

In fact you should check in from time-to-time just to see if they're still paying attention. For instance someone who interviews people all day long tends to tune out if you talk more than 90 seconds.

Interjecting things such as "Was that what you had in mind?" or "Am I addressing the point in a way that's helpful?" can bring the other person back. Your reading of nonverbal communication will tell you

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they've left when their eyes glaze over.

If you see a shift in the nonverbal that concerns you, note it, think about it, and then respond appropriately. It's important to observe what's going on in the other so you can keep the conversation on course. It's part of Emotional Intelligence, social skills and good manners.

For instance, one person may want to hear all the details of your surgery, while it may be too much for another. You may need to vent your spleen about your ex-spouse or your boss, but the listener may find it too intense and become uncomfortable. If you're getting "warding off" signals, back off.

In negotiations and sales, you must be alert to changes that can signal you're using the wrong approach so that you can reorient and try something different.

Being able to read nonverbal communication effectively is important to your social and professional relationships. It will affect your ability to be intimate, to sustain friendships, to influence people, and to succeed in your career.

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There Was A Time, When.....

By (Pat @Maxaid)

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There was a time when "Explode" meant to destroy, not to build.

There was a time when "Guru" meant a religious teacher in India.

There was a time when the "Internet" was the UseNet.

There was a time when "Free Ezine Ads" was productive promotion.

There was a time when "Ezines" were for the most part, informational.

There was a time when "Ram" was a male member of the sheep family.

There was a time when "memory" was all in your mind.

There was a time when "Submit" meant to yield or give in.

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There was a time when "Traffic" was something you wished to avoid.

There was a time when "Hits" was usually used as a military term.

There was a time when "Free" really meant Free, no strings attached.

There was a time when "Tons" was a unit of weight measure.

There was a time when "FFA" meant "Future Farmers of America".

There was a time when "Private Members Club" was Tues. night poker.

There was a time when " If You had told me I'd be doing this now" I would've told you, that you were a prime candidate for the Looney Bin :-)

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