

NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

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ABSTRACT

Non-verbal communication (NVC) is the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless cues between people. It is an essential feature because only a small percentage of our human brain can process verbal communication. And therefore a wrong message can be conveyed if the body language of the speaker does not match the verbal message he or she is delivering. Among the different types of NVC, body language or kinesics is considered to be the most important. Gestures, postures, walk, talk, maintaining eye contact, facial expressions are few that come under body language. It also helps in strengthening a first impression in situations such as in a business interview or while delivering a speech in public. And therefore it is very clearly understood that it is the unsaid words that strongly influence a person's perception about the speaker. This research article throws light on the various aspects pertaining to NVC that one has to keep in mind while delivering a speech in public at different stages of the speech. The article also explains NVC from the audience's perspective thereby enabling better understanding of the scenario.

KEYWORDS: NVC, Types, Body Language (Kinesics), First Impression, Public Speaking, Audience

INTRODUCTION

NVC involves the processes of encoding and decoding. Encoding is the act of generating the information such as facial expressions, gestures, postures etc. Decoding involves the interpretation of the information from the received sensations from prior experiences. Non-verbal communication is an essential feature because only a small percentage of our human brain can process verbal communication. As infants, nonverbal communication is learnt from social-emotional communication, making the face the major organ for communication rather than words. As children become adults or verbal communicators, they begin to look at facial communication, verbal tones and other non-verbal elements subconsciously.

In simple terms, NVC is the sending and receiving of wordless, visual cues between people. NVC encompasses the following types such as: use of voice (paralanguage), touch (haptics), distance (proxemics), physical environments/ appearance, body language (kinesics), use of time (chronemics) and eye contact (oculesics).

Among all these forms of non-verbal communication, body language is one of the most important aspects. Body language, also known as kinesics is also a kind of NVC where thoughts, intentions or feelings are expressed through physical behaviour such as facial expressions, body postures, gestures, eye movements, contact, touch and the use of space. Body language does not have grammar and therefore can be interpreted broadly. It is also simply termed as "language due to a popular culture". Body language often complements verbal communication during social interactions. As previously

mentioned, many researchers have concluded that NVC accounts for the majority of information transmitted during interpersonal interactions. Body language can help to establish a relationship between two people and at times could also help to regulate interactions between them. But its ambiguity is of major concern. It is of utmost importance to accurately read body languages to avoid misunderstanding during social interactions.

In ordinary life also, we use body language all the time, mostly without thinking and we also tend to recognise the same in other people. But, how does this apply to a seminar or presentation? Body language is going to help in building a relationship between you, the speaker and your audience. It builds an essential rapport that can easily convince your listeners of what you are saying. It will also encourage your audience to respond and express how they view about your presentation. Your audience will begin to show signs that would reflect if your presenting skills were impressive, encouraging or boring. It is important therefore that you exhibit appropriate body language along with other forms of NVC and also master the art of recognising and interpreting the signals your audience send out.

NVC AT BEGINNING OF SPEECH

The first step that the audience resorts to once the speaker appears on the stage is to look or rather observe the speaker. They then start making their perception about the speaker, way before even a word is spoken. Putting head down, refraining to make eye contact with audience, hunching of shoulders and shuffling of feet will make the audience assume that you do not want to talk to them. You have already begun to make a poor start to the relationship that you ought to establish with the audience without even uttering a word. On the other hand, barging into the room and giving a quick glance at the audience with half a smile is a clear indication that the speaker is nervous.

The Right Walk

The walking style of the speaker sends out cues to the audience about the state of mind of the speaker. A lively and cheerful person will have a spring in his/her step and thus has a bouncy style of walking. When one feels miserable, they tend to look down and move slowly with heavy steps. So you can understand that the walking style is unconsciously influenced by our emotions. And therefore one must have the 'right' emotion and also other aspects of NVC in order to look convincing, pleasing and reliable in front of the audience. There are two ways by which a speaker can achieve the 'right' emotions.

- **Convince him/her-** No matter how the speaker actually feels before the presentation, it is very essential to motivate oneself by saying that they have a very good audience who are also friendly and supportive. Repeating this statement will help to boost up confidence.
- **Act-** Pretending as though playing a role in a play and the script is also one of the proven methods. This requires the speaker enact as a cheerful and enthusiastic person by nature. The good news about this concept is that in the pursuit of producing the right body language, one would actually start to make the emotion true. NVC is a powerful tool especially in fields such as drama and theatre because it can actually produce the feeling.

Eye Contact

Eye contact between speakers and audience is of enormous importance, failing which the audience would start to suspect the honesty of the speaker and making him/her seem as someone untrustworthy. However, it is not humanly

possible to maintain eye contact with every single person inside the room. The secret is to make eye contact with different people in different parts of the room. This way even if few people are missed, they will understand that you have at least tried to look in their direction.

Eye contact has to be brief as it is virtually the foundation for the trust that must exist between the speaker and the audience. But the important aspect attached to it is that if the speaker begins to make eye contact right after the start, then it is most likely to do so throughout the presentation. Avoiding eye contact with the audience from the beginning will make it increasingly difficult to persuade the audience to listen with confidence and to trust to the information that is being said.

Facial Expressions

Speakers are sometimes reluctant to use facial expressions in a formal backdrop. But this is not a very healthy habit in terms of public speaking. Among an array of facial expressions, the most essential is, Smile. It is one of the easiest and most commonly recognized emotions. Wearing a smile would make the speaker look friendly, amiable, approachable and pleasant altogether. Upon smiling, the audience would smile back at the speaker as a sign of contentment and it is advantageous to begin and build rapport. On the other hand, it is difficult, but not impossible to deceive people. Practicing to feign facial expressions could help survive even on a bad day.

NVC AND QUESTIONS

When a speaker receives a question, giving a pleasant look to the questioner and answering with a smile is advisable. While giving away the answer looking around at the whole audience will keep them involved and will help to project the speaker's voice. Reconfirming with them if the answer was convincing is mandatory.

NVC AT THE END OF THE SESSION

The speaker should remember that even after finishing the session of questions the audience would still be able to view him/her. A sigh of relief or look of exhaustion can be disastrous. Taking leave from the audience with a smile and walking off the stage in a lively manner would give a very pleasant feeling to the audience who would also feel convinced about the information that you shared. It will also give a feeling of satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Awareness about the audience and their reactions are essential. The audience would probably feel sympathetic towards the nerves of a nervous speaker, but they will remain apprehensive. They may feel unsure about the facts and the data that such a speaker is going to put across and will reserve their judgment to see what happens next. The audience might not actually be interested in what the speaker is going to say next, but what emotion or sign he/she is going to forecast to them. They will remain curious to find out how the speaker feels on the inside and will begin to focus more on the actions of the speaker rather than the information being shared. This more often results in a wary relationship between the audience and the speaker. However a pleasant gesture such as a smile or a confident walk would definitely prove to be encouraging. This will force the audience to settle down quickly and wait for the speaker to begin. It is surprising to know that a healthy relationship between the speaker and the audience once built is very difficult to change and therefore, it is very important to establish the same, one which will support the speaker.

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