

Public Speaking and Body Language

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Over the years, I have attended many conferences both for business and self-growth. Among the many workshops and break-out sessions I took was one on developing communication skills. The presenters were in government relations and largely known in the public sectors as influencers as well as being in the same age group of the ones enrolled in the workshop. The presenters body language exuded confidence, experience and a sense of enjoyment in sharing what they've learned over the years.

I was surprised to hear that communication is 99% body language and only 1% verbal. I'm not sure how accurate that is or what tests prove that, but during the class we engaged in several body language exercises that prove this principal. In one exercise, each of the attendees in the workshop lined up against the wall. One by one, we simply walked to the podium and introduced ourselves as we were being recorded by video. We were told to simply say our name, what state we came from and our job title. We were warned that a bright spot light would be shining on us when we stood up on the podium. They encouraged us to ignore the bright light.

When it was my turn, I gave my best greeting and felt confident it stood out from everyone else, but, during video playback we were told that no audio would be played. The instructors wanted us to see what our body language was communicating. Very interesting observations were made. The body language of many told how the light did distract them. Some consciously or unconsciously raised their hand to shield their eyes from the light. A good amount of people used hand gestures during their greeting. A majority of people seemed unanimated, moving their lips but not their head or eyes.

When speaking with others at the workshop they expected a lot more than what the others presented. Instead, they too seemed unanimated. Their overall body language came across as not wanting to be at the workshop, which is exactly how most felt deep inside. Most were deeply disappointed and wondered how many times they stood in front of people thinking that they were inspirational but in reality, the opposite. Consciously, the group at the workshop now strive to be like the handful of animated peers in that workshop.

There were about five individuals that were truly charismatic in their body language. I still

remember one, stepping up to the podium and taking the mike with gusto. While looking at the camera and audience, he gestured with his head, òa helloö by nodding his head up quickly. Everyone laughed when he did that because it truly stood out from everyone else.

Another long-lasting principal I remember from the workshop, because I wrote it down of course is that we remember the mannerisms of a speaker more than their speech. When you think of a recent sermon or presentation you heard, what do you remember? Do you remember the whole message or the way it was presented?

Over all a speaker has about 7-10 minutes to hold an audience's attention; however, the first 15 seconds is how much time you have to grab the attention of your audience. 15 seconds to prove what you are about to say is important to them and if you will be entertaining enough to keep their attention. Waste the 15 seconds and you can watch your audience fidget, turn away, and mentally leave the room.

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Sincerely,

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