

'This book is spot-on and should be a must read.'

– *The Daily Telegraph*

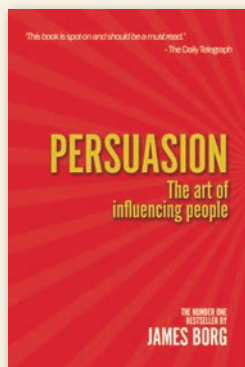
PERSUASION

The art of
influencing people

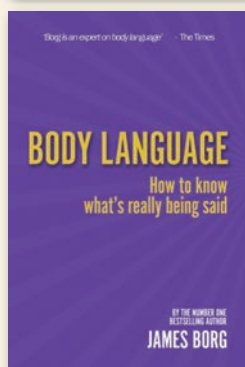
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Interviewee (reading the body language and realizing he'd perhaps been a bit too frank): 'Oh, of course if a client account necessitated work with their overseas offices, it would be a challenge to work within the whole international corporate structure. It's not something I would want to pass up – far from it.'

Having verbally tried to allay the interviewer's concerns, the interviewee now wants to create an open body position on the other side of the desk, so he says: 'Could I just show you this artwork from . . . ?'

Interviewer: 'Sure.' (Reaches over to accept it.)

Back to open body position!

Sitting positions

We can often deduce a person's mindset from the way they are sitting:

- Leg-crossing can accompany the folded arms position or be displayed on its own. It isn't necessarily a negative position. You have to look for the clusters. Women were often told

from an early age that it was the correct way to sit. If accompanied by folded arms, however, it can be a negative/defensive signal. If you're trying to make a point to somebody or sell a product, for example, it's difficult to look enthusiastic with your arms folded and/or legs crossed. And it's not very convincing for the other person. **An open position is necessary.**

- When someone remains slouched in a chair when you walk in, rather than getting up to greet you, the impression given is not favourable. Some interviewers are guilty of doing this. You may have come across this at work when going to see your boss. It doesn't make you feel good. It can be used to make you feel inferior or that you're a time-waster.
- Do you sometimes sit with both hands behind your head? You may do it unconsciously, because you happen to be feeling good and everything's going your way. But, as was stressed earlier on in the chapter, *it's the effect that your body language has on other people that you need to be aware of*. This gesture is often used by people who are feeling superior or confident (for example, a manager who is feeling great because he's telling the person whom he's been dying to get rid of that his employment is terminated), but it can be extremely offensive or irritating to the onlooker. It can be interpreted as aggressive and conveys to the other person that you don't see them as a threat.

Open hand and body gestures are generally used to convey a positive, friendly attitude to the speaker. If you're trying to influence somebody to agree to a course of action or persuade them of something, **use open gestures: time and time again, they have been shown to be the most effective.**

- Another sitting gesture is possibly one that you've used in trying to get away from a relative or well-meaning friend. You know the one I mean: where you either grip the chair as if to go, or lean forward with your hands on your knees. But you never quite make it because either another anecdote comes out or another home-made fruit scone is offered.

In business, this is a valuable pointer to your next move. The other person is satisfied and is waiting for you to move on to the next step or wants to end the session (they may have another meeting to attend or other things to do). If there is a negative reason, you will have picked this up by observing other cluster leaks. It would pay you to make the first move and initiate the ending of the meeting with whatever follow-up is necessary. It can cause frustration if a person signals to you to end the encounter and you don't pick it up or take heed. They then have to start the ritual all over again. This can engender negative feelings.

- Sitting perched on the edge of your chair creates a nervous impression. It can indicate to the other person that you don't really want to be there. It could be because you are nervous yourself, or that you haven't really got the time or perhaps the inclination. Either way, it doesn't create a favourable impression.

Other gestures

There are a whole host of other body signals that can be misinterpreted (or interpreted correctly). You'll see people who, while apparently paying attention to you, are tapping their feet, peering over their glasses, touching their nose, rubbing their eyes or ears, touching their mouth, clenching their hands, drumming their fingertips, blinking a lot, playing with their hair, playing with jewellery or a watch, rocking in their chair, playing with pens or looking at their fingernails excessively. These are just a few mannerisms that could be giving out negative vibes. Watch out for them, and check your own body language.

So, an important point to remember is this:

It is usually our extremities that give us away (as we have the least control over our hands and feet).

Spatial relationships

Posture can be an indicator of the intensity of a person's emotions when part of a cluster. If someone changes the subject to a confidential topic, they may alter their body position to bring the other person closer. People tend to lean forward, towards each other, when there is a degree of respect or liking.

An important aspect of body-language analysis is the concept of spatial relationships; in other words, your **personal-space** preferences, which dictate the *distance* from people at which you are comfortable. The closer the proximity, the more intimate that relationship will tend to be. Psychologists have identified four distinct zones:

- *Intimate*: up to about 18 inches from the body. It will include close friends, spouse and family.
- *Personal*: roughly split into two subzones of 18–30 inches, which can include spouse, close friends and work colleagues you may know well, and 30–48 inches, which is quite close proximity, found when conversing with people at a party, for example. It's interesting to watch how, at a social or work gathering, the arrival of an 'infiltrator' may cause people to step back and adjust their personal 'bubble'. Another person may swivel round to talk to someone else, for example. If the person passes the 'initiation' and stays in the group, then people start to move closer again and the dynamics return to their previous state.
- *Social*: from 4–12 feet, the distance between people who do not know each other that well. It could apply to a seminar situation or a distance from someone higher in the hierarchy at work.
- *Public*: upwards of 12 feet. This is a comfortable distance for being with strangers. If you're speaking at a meeting, this is the zone you would feel comfortable with, as far as distance from your audience is concerned. If it's a small group you are addressing then the distance may be shorter.

It appears that most of us are quite happy to engage in conversations within the personal zone. In business or other formal circumstances, the social zone seems to be used. **We all have our own personal space ‘bubble’ that surrounds us and follows us around.** It is as well to remember this when interacting with new acquaintances.

Just a word about public transport (buses, trains, underground) before I leave your personal space. All rules seem to go out of the window when it comes to public transport – as well as theatres, lifts and other crowd situations. ‘Whatever happened to my intimate and personal space bubble?’ I can almost hear you cry.

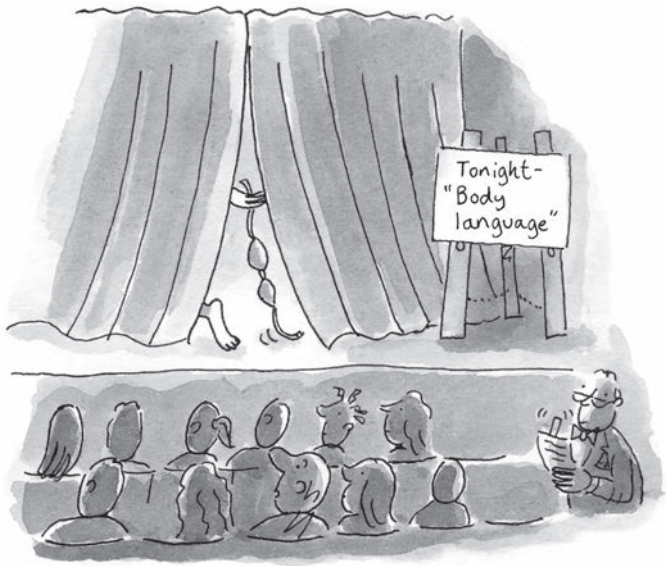
Well, it doesn’t exist and so we go through a whole ritual of body language **defensive** displays to **compensate** for the invasion in these crowded public spaces. In the lift, for example, we’ll remain silent, avoid eye contact, immerse ourselves in reading material or watch in awe as the floor numbers are illuminated from floor to floor! It’s the same on public transport. *We don’t acknowledge the existence of these people*, who, if we did, we would consider to have trespassed on to our two most private zones.

Talking of ‘private zones’, I’d just like to share with you a conversation I had with my psychology professor many years ago when I was trying to define the behavioural aspects of psychology in relation to the cognitive (mind). I asked him what he considered to be the *definition* of a psychologist. He paused, in a way that only serious academics can do, and then said to me:

‘A psychologist is someone who goes to a striptease show and spends most of the time watching the audience.’

So make sure you spend most of your time watching your audience and their body language – and being aware of your own.

An understanding of the communication of bodily movements used when people interact with each other – the science of ‘kinesics’ – is an important one. Hopefully, as well as observing *other people’s* non-verbal behaviour, you’ll have realized that you should



always be saying to yourself: 'What is the impression I am sending with *my* body language?' And, more importantly, 'Is this what I want?' **Make sure your body is talking the right language.**