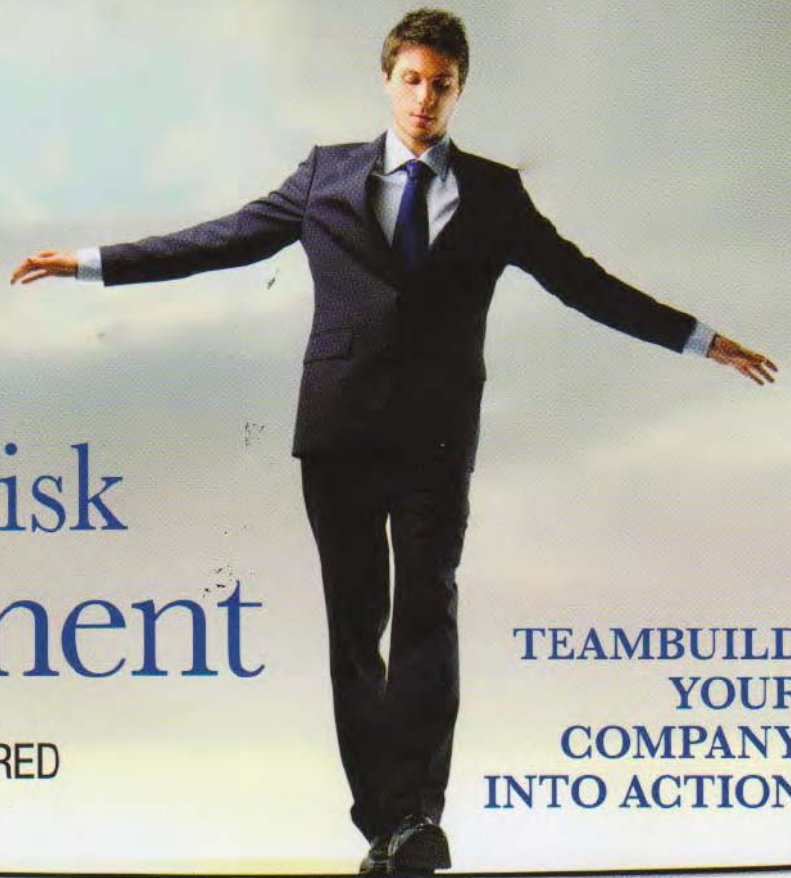


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The Body LANGUAGE of a Leader

BY GEORGIA GREGORY

EVER WONDERED WHAT MAKES YOU STAND OUT FROM THE REST?
THE CEO MAGAZINE TALKS TO BODY LANGUAGE EXPERT DAVID ALSSEMA,
WHO CONFIRMS THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARILY WHAT YOU SAY BUT WHAT
YOU ARE DOING WHEN YOU SAY IT THAT REALLY MATTERS.



Body language has the power to make or break how you are viewed in the minds of your employees. The way you stand, gesture and use your facial expression counts for 55 per cent of communication. Body language therefore is more important than words and tone put together.

There are many historical icons who have mastered the techniques of non-verbal expression and had its effects reverberate all over the globe. When you say their names, often you are reminded of gestures that encompass their ideologies and methods over the words they have spoken: Hitler, Michael Jackson, President Obama – and, of course, the king of body language, Mr Bean.

With all of these people, it has been easy to understand them from the outset as their body language embodies their motivations. Research shows that within the first 10 seconds of meeting someone, we subconsciously make some serious evaluations before they even open their mouth. And once someone labels you as 'likeable' or 'unlikeable', 'powerful' or 'submissive', everything else you do is viewed through that filter.

The way you stand will be judged, as well as the positioning of your head, the line of your sight, and where you place your hands. Therefore, to ensure the best possible first and lasting impression of a leader, the following characteristics can prove helpful:

- Standing with your legs apart, looking like you are taking up a lot of space showing a dominant attitude.
- Looking directly at people's eyes, or just above them. Avoiding this point of contact shows disrespect and boredom.
- Holding your head at a mid-range level showing assertiveness and confidence. It is important to get this level right, however, as having your head facing too far down can make you look insignificant and held too high can appear arrogant.

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- Hands placed behind the back are more effective than in front. Hands placed in front shows cowardice. When speaking, palms upwards is submissive, palms pointing towards each other shows assertiveness, and placing hands over the top is more domineering and aggressive.

David Alssema, body language expert for Paramount Training, knows how vital communication is to success in any workplace. "It is crucial for a leader to have control over their body language to come across in a coherent and effective manner," David affirms, "even if this means adapting to the person you are speaking to."

A recent Dutch study found that waiters get much larger tips when they use the same words and speak in a similar tone to their customers. The same theory applies to body language. "These days, it is most effective to mirror the other person, as it makes them feel more comfortable and opens up more avenues of communication," says David.

This is particularly important when speaking with people from different cultures as well. "If you're doing international business, you really need to adapt to who you're speaking to," David highlights. "Some cultures won't look you in the eyes as it is offensive to their cultures. Others may be offended by a certain wave, thumbs-up sign, or sitting with your legs crossed. It is important to remain observant of the other person at all times to project confidence and not infiltrate doubt. There is no point in speaking English if they don't understand it, and the same goes for body language."

It can be said, therefore, that body language is in the eye of the beholder. The key to using effective body language is understanding how your expressions, gestures, eye contact, use of space, postures, and all the other aspects of nonverbal communication will most likely be interpreted by others – and how those interpretations will most likely affect the observer's behaviour.

While being the chameleon of characteristics, however, it is still important to maintain a sense of control in your body language. This becomes especially significant when addressing issues and conflicts within the company. "When people are involved in conflict, they lose thought of that controlled body

THE PERFECT HANDSHAKE

It has been said that a single handshake can show more personality than the equivalent of a 20 minute talk with someone. Getting the perfect handshake is therefore crucial. Practice makes perfect; however, it may not be the same every time. Don't be afraid to set the level of authority while trying to mirror the other person's handshake. "Watch for a moment to see what they would want you to come across as. It only takes a couple of seconds to really understand the other person's body language because actions really do speak louder than words," advises David Alssema, body language expert for Paramount Training.

"It's all about building rapport and having the same level of authority. A handshake is a big player in showing the level of strength and aggressiveness of your desired leadership style."



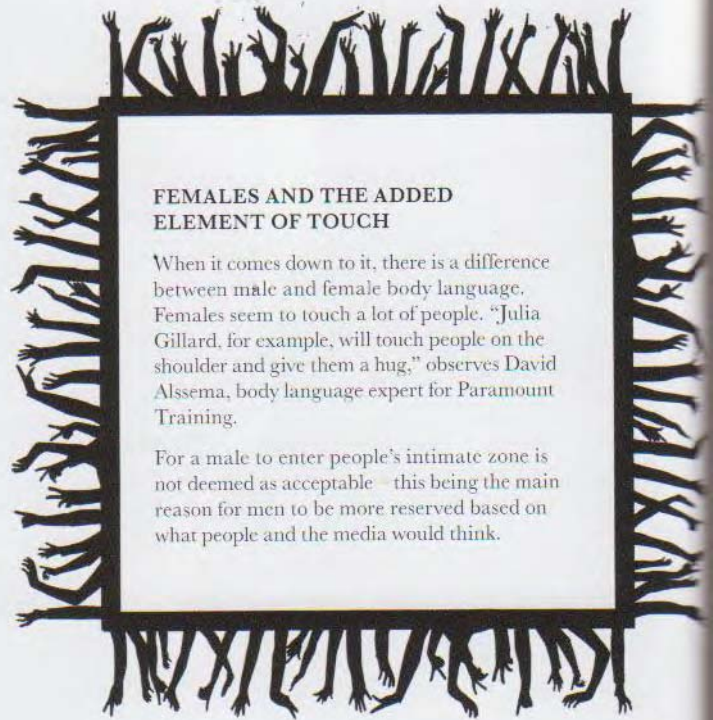


language that is usually so readily available," David comments. "A true leader can remain calm and collected under pressure. While folding may not be in your nature, it may come across in your nervous hands or a twitching eye. The true nature of your character may be exposed, revealing the less-controlled leader as a result."

Sometimes, however, the outer layer of skin is hard to keep on, as the subconscious provides a barrier against the lies. "Our subconscious is mostly a protection against lies," affirms David. "It shows up things in our faces such as dilating eyes, blushing and twitching. Things like that you just can't trick. You can rehearse your body only so well, but on the spot when something unexpected happens, a lot of people can pick it up. You can't use the subconscious to lie, but you can do it consciously. It is important to come across as truthful while being conscious of the way you can tune that body language not only for how people perceive you but ensuring they understand you."

When your words and your body language are out of alignment, you don't make sense. "If you say something but look like you're saying something else in your expression, people are going to read your body language more importantly," David insists.

Therefore, it is important to be you and to build confidence within. "Obviously, your true feelings are going to show on the outside,



FEMALES AND THE ADDED ELEMENT OF TOUCH

When it comes down to it, there is a difference between male and female body language. Females seem to touch a lot of people. "Julia Gillard, for example, will touch people on the shoulder and give them a hug," observes David Alssema, body language expert for Paramount Training.

For a male to enter people's intimate zone is not deemed as acceptable — this being the main reason for men to be more reserved based on what people and the media would think.



“People are not born leaders; they become leaders. It's a rehearsal.”

- David Alssema

so it's important to get a match on the inside." David warns. "If there is no match, then that subconscious is going to show up. Looking at other people's use of body language is a good idea, and a bit of practice never hurts for those times when a spanner is thrown in the works."

The perfect body language doesn't just happen overnight. "Really, it's about acting the part to become the part itself," David assures. "Trying to get that image across initially is very important; and even if it seems put on at first, over time it will continue to help you become the ideal leader.

"People are not born leaders; they become leaders. It's a rehearsal. Those things we've picked up from childhood that we do from time to time become habit, and we need to be taught to replace it with something new. Sometimes when people are thrown into a position, they can become a leader, and then as a result their confidence will rise and a leader will develop. It's just about learning a new skill and overpowering the old habits."

So after reading this article, put down the pen and paper for your next speech or meeting, go to the bathroom, look in the mirror, and start practising.

After all, this is how Mr Bean made his millions. ●