
Psychic or Body Language Expert: You Decide

Can the CBS network hit show “The Mentalist” contain business lessons for you? Definitely! If you’re not familiar with “The Mentalist,” the show stars Golden Globe Award nominee Simon Baker as Patrick Jane, an independent consultant with the California Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Jane has a remarkable track record for solving serious crimes by using his well-honed skills of observation. His life prior to joining the CBI was spent as a night club entertainer showing off his “psychic” abilities.

The essence of Jane’s talent is in accurately reading and interpreting body language. He demonstrates his abilities with showbiz pizzazz and seldom follows conventional police investigatory procedure.

Accurate body language interpretation is a learned skill, not a genetically-inherited birth fluke. Sharpen your skills in reading what others are thinking and you may:

1. Increase your earnings and sales commissions by closing bigger sales more rapidly.
2. Open up new career opportunities as you read your boss and colleagues thoughts more accurately and rapidly. You’ll more rapidly establish your professional credentials and reputation.
3. Meet and develop new relationships with people who respond to your advances.
4. Improve communication skills by avoiding misinterpretation.
5. Fine-tuning listening abilities.

The Limbic Brain’s Role in Signal Sending

Our inner-most secrets leak out in the form of body language sent from our limbic brain, which is also known as the emotional brain or “Old Mammalian Brain.” The limbic brain emits automatic, reflexive orders to the body to respond appropriately to cues from our environment. It runs on automatic pilot without an editor to check how it responds to people or events in our environment. The neocortex or “rational brain” does not get involved with the limbic brain’s reactions. The neocortex is the part of the brain where language, consciousness, rational thought and imagination develop.

Joe Navarro in his best-selling book, *What Every Body is Saying*, describes the limbic brain’s role in one of three physical reactions: Freeze, Flight or Fight. Navarro is a retired 25-year veteran of the FBI counter-intelligence community.

FREEZE: We are not unlike our reptilian earth buddy, the chameleon. It changes colors to adapt to specific situations. To attract a mate, the chameleon uses a flashy exterior to bring the opposite sex into its lair. If a predator lurks nearby, the reptile stops all movement and hopes to blend in with the surroundings.

For human “chameleons” when the boss searches for a volunteer to carry out a new work assignment, the response is to shrink in size, hunch the shoulders and avoid eye contact. The ability to hold one’s breath for long periods of time helps too. The human motto becomes “out of sight, out of mind.”

FLEE: The cheetah flees predators or chases down an antelope at a speed clocked at 64.3 miles per hour. Man’s best pace is 25 miles per hour. We avoid human attackers by running.

FIGHT: When a foe approaches and our wits and fast-talking won’t save us, and our ego does not allow us to run, our final response may be to fight. Winning depends on our physical condition and the weapons available to assist in our battle.

The Baseline

In any body language lesson, it is essential to understand the role of establishing a “normal behavior baseline” prior to reading body language. What is normal for one person may be abnormal for another. To master reading body language, it is important to take the time to establish a baseline observation period in a relaxed, non-threatening setting for your prospect or target. This get-acquainted information gathering activity is similar to what the person who administers a lie detector test goes through to obtain their subject’s respiration depth and rate, blood pressure readings and skin conductivity.

Establishing a baseline allows body language experts to be better able to spot changes in someone’s external behavior when switching from a casual conversation to asking probing questions or interrogating the individual.

Let’s examine three areas of the body that can provide important body language clues: the eyes, feet and hands.

Body Talk: The Eyes

“The eyes are the mirror to the soul,” a phrase attributed by many to Cicero during his lifetime (106-43 B.C.). The sentence is a beautiful descriptive way to say that the “eyes do not lie.” Depending on the home you were raised in, this may not be true for you. When parents threaten corporal punishment for showing “that guilty look,” many learn at an early age to mask facial expressions. Police interrogators can attest to the fact that they often face liars who mask their guilt with strong, unflinching eye contact that fools many less accomplished body language experts.

However, there are a few eye “tells” that may still be good indicators of the individual’s inner thoughts. Blinking at a rapid pace can be a sign of nervousness, inner stress, personal strife and even poor self-confidence. The average conversational blink rate is between 12 and 20 blinks per minute.

The Center for Non-verbal Studies reported that in the 1996 presidential campaign, candidate Bob Dole maintained an average blink rate of 147 blinks per minute and Bill Clinton, blinked 99 times per minute. That rapid blinking from politicians can result in lost votes and in a court of law, juries may deliver a guilty verdict because the suspect “looked like he was lying.”

Frequent eye rubbing can indicate that someone does not believe what they said, heard or saw. Another eye signal is the rolling of the eyes. This can mean disrespect or disagreement and is definitely not a positive signal. When observing eye rubbing or rolling, it’s best to stop and make inquiries as to what is going on in your subject’s mind.

Body Talk: The Hands

Stop where you are! Come closer. Keep your distance. I surrender. It’s nice to meet you. Each of these phrases relates to a specific hand gesture. The tricky part is interpreting them correctly. These manual gestures are not universal and, therefore, care must be taken in deciphering their meaning to avoid misunderstanding.

In the United States, when an individual extends their right hand towards you at waist level, they are usually attempting to shake hands. Two hands grasping one another may be the only body contact experienced with another person before a conversation or negotiation commences. There are numerous types of handshake greetings and each carries their own meaning. They also set the stage for future conversation and the relationship structure.

The grasp can range in force from a 10-second bone-crushing grip to a two-second, limp extension of the fingertips. The “power grip” sends a message that the individual is the authority, in charge and that they will attempt to dominate the meeting or relationship that follows. The flaccid, cold “jelly fish extension” sends a message of weakness, confusion and usually a lack of self-confidence.

Our primary goal should not be to intimidate another individual with the shake of a hand. Touch carries a strong message and leaves a lasting physical memory. Start things out right by always extending your hand to those you meet for the first time, no matter what their age or gender. The more modern “knuckle-bump” may be okay for a casual setting in which young people meet up. However, if the meeting involves adults on either side of the greeting, use the more acceptable and traditional handshake as your greeting.

Body Talk: The Feet

FearLess Negotiator

Mary A. Redmond
Speaker, Author, Consultant

We work so hard on our facial expressions that we never think to teach our feet how to fib. Feet move us out of danger as we flee from our enemies or serve as weapons when we're cornered. They also transport us to a location where we can find food for survival. They allow us to celebrate our joy through dance.

British anthropologist and ethnologist Desmond Morris (1985) reported that our feet communicate more honestly than any other body part.

When discussing an uncomfortable topic we may be surprised to look down and find that our feet are pointed towards the exit doors. The feet were ready to depart and our mind and voice had not yet made the connection to prepare for departure.

When happy and pleased with ourselves we may walk with a "bounce in our step." Our bodies express our elation. Our pupils may dilate the corners of our eyes crinkle and our lips move upward into a smile. These behaviors are sending a message of happiness and joy.

Whether we play cards at home in a casual setting with friends or gamble at a high stakes poker game in Las Vegas, our feet display our delight when we are dealt a winning hand. We have a case of "Fidgety Foot-it is." We may not be able to peer under the tables to check out the twitching toes, but we easily discern the bouncing torso and shoulder vibrations as a body innocently responds to the inner celebration.

Those Dancing Feet show up in Las Vegas at Caesar's Palace or under a New York board room conference table during a critical life-changing negotiation.

Summary

As we become more observant of body language, we more frequently see what others are really thinking. Our words may profess love and dedication while our eyes, hands and feet attest the lies inside. Our bodies scream truth and display accurate feelings as our secrets find a way of sneaking out.

Learning how to accurately interpret body language can unlock our truths that we might otherwise invest weeks or months to uncover.

Mary A. Redmond

Mary A. Redmond, The FearLess Negotiator, works with business professionals who want to become stronger negotiators. After attending one of her workshops or coaching sessions, clients feel more confident in stressful business situation whether they need to close bigger and more complex sales, secure the perfect new job, ask for that well-deserved raise or improve communication with their colleagues, bosses or families.