

# The Meaning Behind Body Language

**H**ow many times have you left a meeting with investors and wondered how well it went? You can gain much stronger insight from such interactions by interpreting body language, asserts Patti Wood, a nationally acclaimed speaker, trainer and author on the topic of nonverbal communication. Wood recently led the Cincinnati Tri-State chapter through a high-energy workshop geared at training IROs in nonverbal cues.

Wood helped workshop participants understand the importance of first impressions and the meaning of various handshakes and gestures. She cited research indicating that 10,000 nonverbal cues can be conveyed in a single minute. While

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we subconsciously process these cues almost continually, we would benefit from raising our awareness to a more conscious level. Because it can take up to six months to change a poor first impression, it's important to make the right impression from the start. Wood pointed out that first impressions are highly accurate—that's one reason why children and dogs have such good instincts.

## Where Power Resides

During the workshop, participants paired up to put into practice the information that Wood relayed. Explaining the power of handshakes—they're the equivalent of three hours of face-to-face interaction—she provided tips on how to shake hands effectively and how to recover when your handshake does not turn out as you intended.

Participants also learned how use of space around the body usually reflects power. Various body positions and gestures send important nonverbal messages. For example, how a person places his or her feet can indicate how open he or she is to your message or to negotiating.

## Body Windows

According to Wood, hands, eyes and the throat area serve as "body windows." Here are ways in which they communicate:

- **Guarding the mouth**—When we cover our mouth, oftentimes we are suppressing a negative thought. When we put a hand over the mouth, we could be lying, trying to keep the truth from coming out.
- **Holding**—When our parents held onto us, it conveyed that everything would be okay. To communicate this sentiment as adults, we may hold our hands together or grip our arms in a self-hug as we speak.
- **Touching the temple**—When we are confused, we may touch our temple—the "on" button for the brain. Our eyes may blink or stretch open, as if we want to see more clearly.
- **Grimacing**—When a person is suspicious, doubting you or your claims, he



**Patti Wood led high-energy training in nonverbal communication.**

or she may grimace and exhale through clenched teeth or give a tight smile to mask displeasure.

- **Smiling, tilting and blinking**—When someone is interested in what you're saying, he or she may signal that interest by smiling, tilting the head to hear better or blinking with excitement. That person is *up* for what you are saying, so his or her overall posture will be up and attentive as well.

In closing the workshop, Wood covered the subconscious implications from mirroring posture and nonverbal cues. Doing so can be effective in establishing rapport and influencing others.

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