

SOME TIPS FOR COACHES AND COMMUNICATORS ON OBSERVING VOICE USE AND NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR

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It has been said that 80% of communication is through voice inflection and non-verbal behavior. Further, it seems to have an extraordinary influence on people because such messages often are transmitted and received below ordinary levels of awareness. All the more important, then, for group facilitators to think clearly about how you interpret these behavioral “messages” so that the most accurate understanding possible can be reached.

Some tips are offered in this paper to help you clarify the specific observations on which you base your interpretation of another’s voice tone and body language. All of these communication signals from others are subject to the influences of your own mental filters that could sway your interpretation. It is up to you to remain as clear minded about the specific cues you are actually observing in others and correct for the personal biases you may be adding to your observations. ***The desired outcome is a fair-minded and accurate interpretation of another’s meaning*** being transmitted through non-verbal behavior that is, at once, revealing and potentially confusing.

TIPS FOR OBSERVING ANOTHER’S VOICE

Voice intonation and inflection carry many meanings that shade or emphasize the words they accompany. A sense of comedy or tragedy is as much the result of intonation and inflection as of the words used, maybe even more so. We laugh or cry at both the word messages and the manner in which the voice delivers them. The tips in this section are intended to help you notice more clearly what it is about the voice tone or inflection that evokes different responses in you or other team members.

◇ **Give your special attention to the *sound* of the other’s voice rather than to the words that are being said.**

Notice the quality of the voice tone; the volume; the softness or harshness of the timbre; lightness or heaviness; fullness or hollowness; ponderous or lilting; coming from deep in the diaphragm, in the throat, or up behind the person’s nose; the presence or absence of an accent; etc.

◇ **Give your attention to how you are responding to the voice tone and inflection.**

Notice if you feel joy, humor, mirth, empathy, sympathy, tension or anxiety, anger, sadness, fear, boredom or neutrality. Are you interested, Specify, if you can, exactly what it is in the voice tone that evokes the feelings you experience.

◇ **Give your attention to the images you create in your mind in response to the voice, especially if you cannot see person whose voice it is such as when you are on the telephone or in a different room.**

Notice images you create in your mind in response to the voice such as the what the person looks like (male or female, large or small, cultural background, wearing apparel, etc.), and what body movements they may be making in association with their voice (hand gestures, head movements, facial expressions, etc.)

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- ◇ **Give your attention to the way the person seems to project themselves as a speaker.**

Notice if they seem to project self-confidence or self-depreciation; enthusiasm or disengaged; hesitation or clarity; naturalness or affectation; animated or monotonous; happy or depressed; lively or passive; cool and distant or warm and close; etc.

TIPS FOR OBSERVING ANOTHER'S BODY LANGUAGE

A person's general demeanor and physical behavior communicates many subtle messages simultaneously. Sometimes they reveal attitudes or values; conflict or congruence. "The body speaks," the saying goes, and it does so in powerful ways. The tips in this section will provide you with ideas for becoming clear about exactly what it is in the body's language that suggests meaning to you or team members.

- ◇ **Give your attention to the person's facial expressions, hand gestures, arm, leg, and overall body posture and movement.**

Notice facial expressions to see if they match the person's voice tone and verbal content; if such expressions as head nodding or shaking and eyebrow-raising match words at appropriate moments; if hand gestures add to or detract from the speaker's message and how that is so for you; if body movements fit with the verbal content and voice tone; if the overall physical demeanor is well or poorly integrated with the person's presentation of self.

- ◇ **Give attention to physical cues that reveal how the person projects self to others.**

Notice if the person appears calm and physically quiet or uptight and squirmy; if the legs and arms are relaxed or moving repetitively; if the body is firm, relaxed, rigid, slumped over; if positions or movements of the back, hips, and shoulders appear well integrated, coordinated and graceful, or disjointed and awkward.

- ◇ **Give your attention to how you are responding to the person's facial expressions, gestures, and body movement.**

Notice if you are comfortable or uncomfortable in the presence of the person's movement and gestures; if you find yourself interested or disinterested; if you experience yourself attracted to or repelled from them. Take note of the criteria or assumptions you may be applying to the person's body language that lead you to your own experience in the presence of their physical presentation.

- ◇ **Give your attention to the feelings in yourself that seem to be stimulated by this person's body language.**

Notice if you feel yourself moving toward or away from them; if you feel sympathetic or hostile toward them; if you feel excited or bored, trustful or mistrustful; if you want contact with them to continue or to stop. To the extent possible, identify the specific physical behaviors they display that seem to account for your feelings; carefully separate those observable cues in their behavior from filters in your own mind that may be influencing your feelings.