

Body Language

How to read others' thoughts by
their gestures

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positions are shown in this example: let's say that you ask someone to pick up a box and carry it to another location in the same room. We assume that you use the same tone of voice, the same words and facial expressions, and change only the position of your palm.



Figure 17 *Submissive palm position*



Figure 18 *Dominant palm position*

The palm facing up is used as a submissive, non-threatening gesture, reminiscent of the pleading gesture of a street beggar. The person being asked to move the box will not feel that the request is given with pressure and, in a normal superior/subordinate situation, will not feel threatened by the request.

When the palm is turned to face downwards, you will have immediate authority. The person to whom you have directed the request feels that he has been given an order to remove the box and may feel antagonistic towards you, depending on your relationship with him. For example, if the person to whom you gave the request was a co-worker of equal status, he could reject your palm-down request and would be more likely to carry out your wish if you had used the palm-up position. If the person to whom you give the request is your subordinate, the palm-down gesture is acceptable, as you have the authority to use it.

In Figure 19, the palm is closed into a fist and the pointed finger becomes a symbolic club with which the speaker figuratively beats his listener into submission. The pointed finger is one of the most irritating gestures that a person can use while speaking, particularly when it beats time to the speaker's words. If you are an habitual finger-pointer, try practising the palm-up and palm-down positions and you will find that you create a more relaxed attitude and have a more positive effect on other people.



Figure 19 *Aggressive palm position*

the Figure 40 position. Like all negative gestures, some action needs to be taken to unlock the person's fingers to expose the palms and the front of the body, or the hostile attitude will remain.



Figure 40 *Hands clenched in middle position*



Figure 41 *Hands clenched in lower position*

Steepling Hands

I stated at the beginning of this book that gestures come in clusters, like words in a sentence, and that they must be interpreted in the context in which they are observed. 'Steepling', as Birdwhistell called it, can be an exception to these rules, as it is often used in isolation of other gestures. In fact, people who are confident, superior types or who use minimal or restricted body gestures often use this gesture, and, by doing so, they signal their confident attitude.

My observation and research into this fascinating gesture show that it is frequently used in superior/subordinate interaction and that it can be an isolated gesture which indicates a confident or 'know-it-all' attitude. Managers often use this gesture position



Figure 59 The collar pull



Figure 60 Reassurance is needed here

Fingers in the Mouth

Morris's explanation of this gesture is that the fingers are placed in the mouth when a person is under pressure. It is an unconscious attempt by the person to revert to the security of the child sucking on his mother's breast. The young child substitutes his thumb for the breast and as an adult, he not only puts his fingers to his mouth but inserts such things as cigarettes, pipes, pens and the like into it. Whereas most hand-to-mouth gestures involve lying or deception, the fingers-in-mouth gesture is an outward manifestation of an inner need for reassurance. Giving the person guarantees and assurances is appropriate when this gesture appears (Figure 60).

INTERPRETING AND MISINTERPRETING

The ability to accurately interpret hand-to-face gestures in a given set of circumstances takes considerable time and observation to acquire. We can confidently assume that, when a person uses one of the hand-to-face gestures just mentioned, a negative thought has entered his mind. The question is, what is the negative? It could be doubt, deceit, uncertainty, exaggeration, apprehension or outright lying. The real skill of interpretation is the ability to pick which of the negatives mentioned is the correct one. This can best be done by an analysis of the gestures preceding the hand-to-face gesture and interpreting it in context.

Standard Arm-Cross Gesture

Both arms are folded together across the chest as an attempt to 'hide' from an unfavourable situation. There are many arm-folding positions, but this book will discuss the three most common ones. The standard arm-cross gesture (Figure 70) is a universal gesture signifying the same defensive or negative attitude almost everywhere. It is commonly seen when a person is among strangers in public meetings, queues, cafeterias, elevators or anywhere that people feel uncertain or insecure.

During a recent lecture tour in the United States, I opened one particular meeting by deliberately defaming the character of several highly respected men who were well-known to the seminar audience and who were attending the conference. Immediately following the verbal attack, the members of the audience were asked to hold the positions and gestures they had taken. They were all quite amused when I pointed out that about 90 per cent of them had taken the folded arms position immediately after my verbal attack began. This clearly shows that most people will take an arms folded position when they disagree with what they are hearing. Many public speakers have failed to communicate their message to the audience because they have not seen the folded arms gestures of their listeners. Experienced speakers know that this gesture demonstrates the necessity of using a good 'ice breaker' to move the audience into a more receptive posture that will alter the listeners' attitude towards the speaker.

When you see the arm-cross gesture occur during a face-to-face encounter, it is reasonable to assume that you may have said something with which the other person disagrees, so it may be pointless continuing your line of argument even though the other person may be verbally agreeing with you. The fact is that the non-verbal medium does not lie - the verbal medium does. Your objective at this point should be to try to discover the cause of the arms-folded gesture and to move the person into a more receptive position. Remember: as long as the arms-folded gesture remains, the negative attitude will remain. The attitude causes the gestures to occur and prolonging the gesture forces the attitude to remain.



Figure 70 Standard arm-cross

A simple but effective method of breaking the folded-arms position is to hand the person a pen, a book or something that forces him to unfold his arms to reach forward.

In a lawyer's office the prosecutor may be seen using a fists-clenched arm-cross while the defence may have taken the arm-gripping position.

Status can influence arm-folding gestures. A superior type can make his superiority felt in the presence of persons he has just met by not folding his arms. Say, for example, that at a company social function, the general manager is introduced to several new employees whom he has not met. Having greeted them with a dominant handshake, he stands at the social distance from the new employees with his hands by his side, behind his back in the superior palm-in-palm position (see Figure 44), or with one hand in his pocket. He rarely folds his arms to show the slightest hint of nervousness. Conversely, after shaking hands with the boss, the new employees take full or partial arm-fold gestures because of their apprehension about being in the presence of the company's top man. Both the general manager and the new employees feel comfortable with their respective gestures as each, is signalling his status relative to the other. But what happens when the general manager meets a young, up-and-coming executive who is also a superior type and who may even feel that he is as important as the general manager? The likely outcome is that after the two give each other a dominant handshake, the young executive will take an arm-fold gesture with both thumbs pointing vertically upwards (Figure 73). This gesture is the defensive version of both arms being held horizontally in front of the body with both thumbs up to show that the user is 'cool', a gesture characterised by Henry Winkler who played the Fonz in the television series Happy Days. The thumbs-up gesture is our way of showing that we have a self-confident attitude and the folded arms give a feeling of protection.

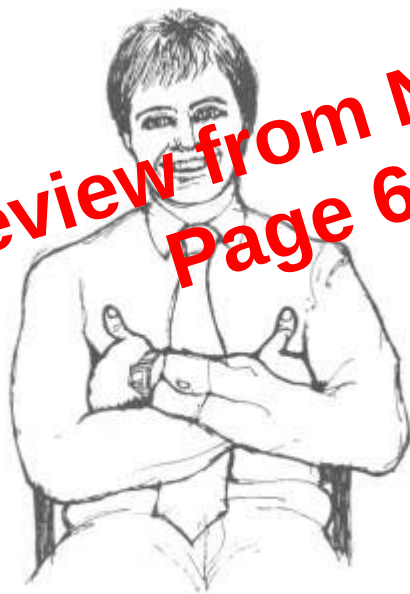


Figure 73 Superior attitude shown



Figure 74 Holding hands with oneself

Sales people need to analyse why a buyer may have taken this gesture to know whether their approach is effective. If the thumbs-up gesture has come towards the end of the sales presentation and is combined with many other positive gestures used by the buyer, the sales person can move comfortably into closing the sale and asking for the order. If, on the other hand, at the close of the sale the buyer moves into the fist-clenched arm cross position (Figure 71) and has a poker face, the sales person can be inviting disastrous consequences by attempting to ask for the order. Instead it is better if he quickly goes back to his sales presentation and asks more questions to try to



Figure 89 Standing foot-lock position



Figure 90 Seated foot-lock position

A warm, friendly, low-key approach is needed if you eventually hope to open this clam. This position is common to shy or timid women.

I recall an interview in which a new salesman was trying to sell insurance to a young married couple. The sale was unsuccessful and the new salesman could not understand why he had lost it, because he had followed the sales track perfectly. I pointed out that he had failed to notice that the woman was sitting with a tight foot lock position throughout the interview. Had the salesman understood the significance of this gesture, he could have involved her in the sales presentation, and might have achieved a better result.

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is very disconcerting to him and he may even fall backwards off his chair in an attempt to avoid being forced to change position.

If you have a straddler coming to visit you and his aggressive attitude annoys you, be sure to seat him on a fixed chair that has arms to stop him from taking his favourite position.

Picking Imaginary Lint

When a person disapproves of the opinions or attitudes of others but feels constrained in giving his point of view, the non-verbal gestures that occur are known as displacement gestures, that is, they result from a withheld opinion. Picking imaginary pieces of lint from the clothing is one such gesture. The lintpicker usually looks away from the other people towards the floor while performing this minor, irrelevant action. This is one of the most common signals of disapproval and when the listener continually picks imaginary pieces of lint off his clothing it is a good indication that he does not like what is being said, even though he may be verbally agreeing with everything.

Open your palms and say, 'Well, what do you think?' or, 'I can see you have some thoughts on this. Would you mind telling me what they are?' Sit back, arms apart, palms visible, and wait for the answer. If the person says he is in agreement with you but continues to pick the imaginary lint, you may need to take an even more direct approach to discover his hidden objection.

HEAD GESTURES

This book would not be complete without a discussion of the basic head movements, the two most widely used being the head nod and the head shake. The head nod is a positive gesture used in most cultures to signify 'Yes', or affirmation. Research conducted with people who have been deaf, dumb and blind from birth shows that they also use this gesture to signify the affirmative, which has given rise to the theory that this may be an inborn gesture. The headshake, usually meaning 'No', is also claimed by some to be an inborn action; however, others have theorised that it is the first gesture a human being learns. They believe that when the newborn baby has had enough milk, he shakes his head from side to side to reject his mother's breast. Similarly, the young child who has had enough to eat uses the head shake to reject his parent's attempt to spoonfeed him.

One of the easiest ways to uncover a disguised objection when dealing with others is to watch if the person uses the headshake gesture while verbalising his agreement with you. Take, for example, the person who verbalises, 'Yes, I can see your point of view', or, 'I really enjoy working here', or, 'We'll definitely do business after Christmas', whilst shaking his head from side to side. Even though this may sound convincing, the head shake gesture signals that a negative attitude exists and you would be well advised to reject what the person has said and to question him further.

Basic Head Positions

There are three basic head positions. The first is with the head up (Figure 93) and is the position taken by the person who has a neutral attitude about what he is hearing. The head usually remains still and may occasionally give small nods. Hand-to-cheek evaluation gestures are often used with this position.

When the head tilts to one side it shows that interest has developed (Figure 94). Charles Darwin was one of the first to note that humans, as well as animals, tilt their heads to one side when they become interested in something. If you are giving a sales presentation or delivering a speech, always make a point of looking for this gesture among your audience. When you see them tilt their heads and lean forward using hand-to-chin evaluation gestures, you are getting the point across. Women use this head position to show interest in an attractive male. When others are speaking to you, all you need do is use the head-tilted position and head nods to make the listener feel warm towards you.

When the head is down, it signals that the attitude is negative and even judgmental (Figure 95). Critical evaluation clusters are normally made with the head down and, unless you can get the person's head up or tilted, you may have a communication problem. As a public speaker, you will often be confronted by an audience whose members are all seated with head down and arms folded on the chest. Professional speakers and trainers usually do something that involves audience participation before they begin their address. This is intended to get the audience's heads up and to get them involved. If the speaker's ploy is successful, the audience's next head position will be the head tilted.

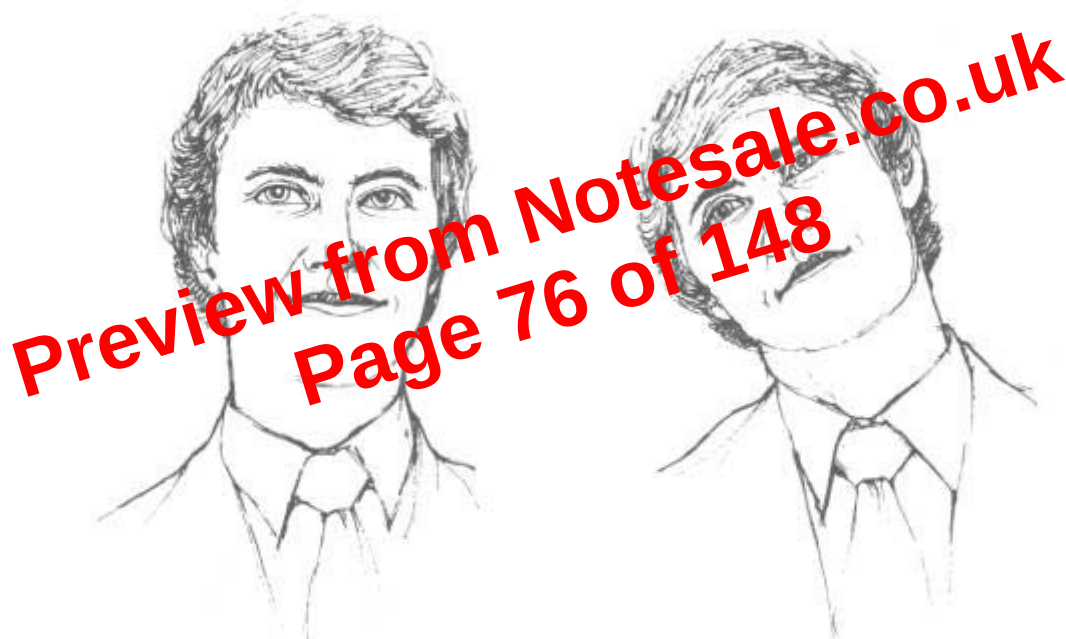


Figure 93 *Neutral head position*

Figure 94 *Interested position*

Both Hands Behind Head

This gesture is typical of such professionals as accountants, lawyers, sales managers, bank managers or people who are feeling confident, dominant, or superior about something. If we could read the person's mind, he would be saying something like, 'I have all the answers' or, 'Maybe one day you'll be as smart as I am', or even 'Everything's under control'. It is also a gesture used by the 'know-it-all' individual and many people find it irritating when someone does it to them. Lawyers habitually use this with their peers as a non-verbal demonstration of how knowledgeable they are. It can also be used as a territorial sign to show that the person has staked a claim to that

displaying another gesture (Figure 99). Critical evaluation gestures are often seen with the hands-on-hips pose.

Seated Readiness

One of the most valuable gestures that a negotiator can learn to recognise is seated readiness. In the selling situation, for example, if the potential buyer were to take this gesture at the end of the sales presentation and the interview had progressed successfully up to that point, the sales person could ask for the order and expect to get it. Video replays of insurance sales people interviewing potential buyers revealed that, whenever the seated readiness gesture followed the chinstroking gesture (decision-making), the client bought the policy. In contrast to this, if, during the close of the sale, the client took the arms-crossed position immediately following the chin-stroking gesture, the sale was usually unsuccessful. Unfortunately, most sales courses teach sales people always to ask for the order with little regard for the client's body position and gestures. Learning to recognise such gestures as readiness not only helps make more sales but helps to keep many more people in the selling profession. The seated readiness gesture is also taken by the angry person who is ready for something else - to throw you out. The preceding gesture clusters give the correct assessment of the person's intentions.

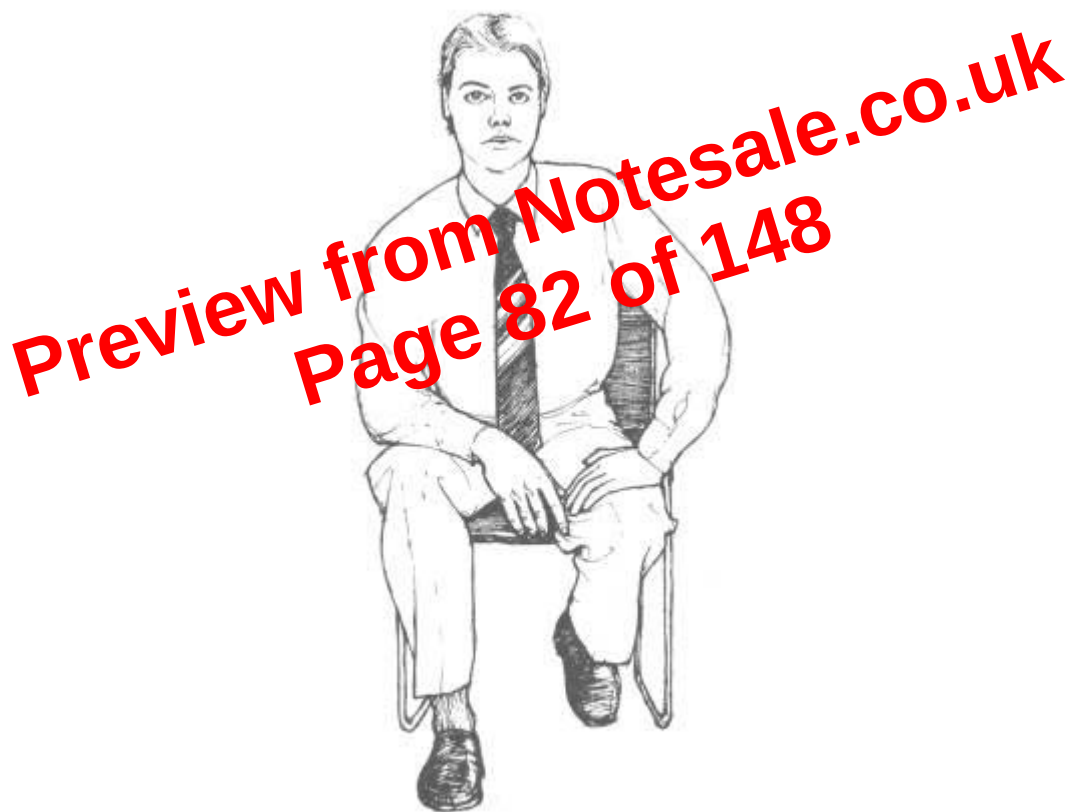


Figure 100 *Ready to proceed*

causes B to think that A likes him, so B will like A in return. In other words, to build a good rapport with another person, your gaze should meet his about 60 to 70 per cent of the time. This will also make him begin to like you. It is not surprising, therefore, that the nervous, timid person who meets your gaze less than one-third of the time is rarely trusted. In negotiation, dark tinted glasses should be avoided at all times as they make others feel that you are staring at them.

Like most body language and gestures, the length of time that one person gazes at another is culturally determined. Southern Europeans have a high frequency of gaze that may be offensive to others and the Japanese gaze at the neck rather than at the face when conversing. Always be sure to consider cultural circumstances before jumping to conclusions.

Not only is the length of the gaze significant; just as important is the geographical area of the person's face and body at which you direct your gaze, as this also affects the outcome of a negotiation. These signals are transmitted and received non-verbally and are accurately interpreted by the receiver.

It takes about thirty days of conscious practice before the following eye techniques can be effectively used to improve your communication skills.

The Business Gaze (Figure 109)

When having discussions on a business level, imagine that there is a triangle on the other person's forehead. By keeping your gaze directed at this area, you create a serious atmosphere and the other person senses that you mean business. Provided that your gaze does not drop below the level of the other person's eyes, you are able to maintain control of the interaction.

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Figure 111 *The intimate gaze*

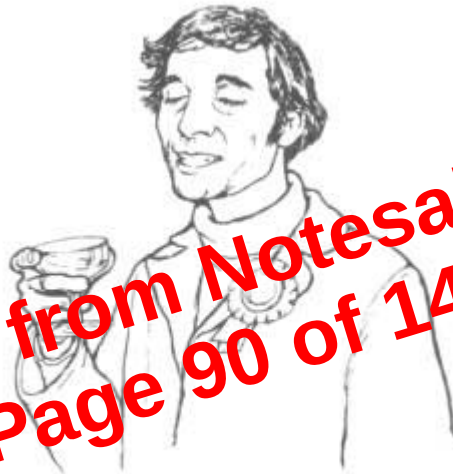


Figure 112 *Shutting everyone out*

Sideways Glance

The sideways glance is used to communicate either interest or hostility. When it is combined with slightly raised eyebrows or a smile, it communicates interest and is frequently used as a courtship signal. If it is combined with down-turned eyebrows, furrowed brow or the corners of the mouth down-turned, it signals a suspicious, hostile or critical attitude.

Summary

The area of the other person's body upon which you direct your gaze can have a powerful effect on the outcome of any face-to-face encounter. If you were a manager who was going to reprimand a lazy employee, which gaze would you use? If you used the social gaze, the employee would take less heed of your words, regardless of how loud or threatening you sounded. The social gaze would take the sting out of your



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Figures 113 & 114 Use the pen to keep control of a person's gaze

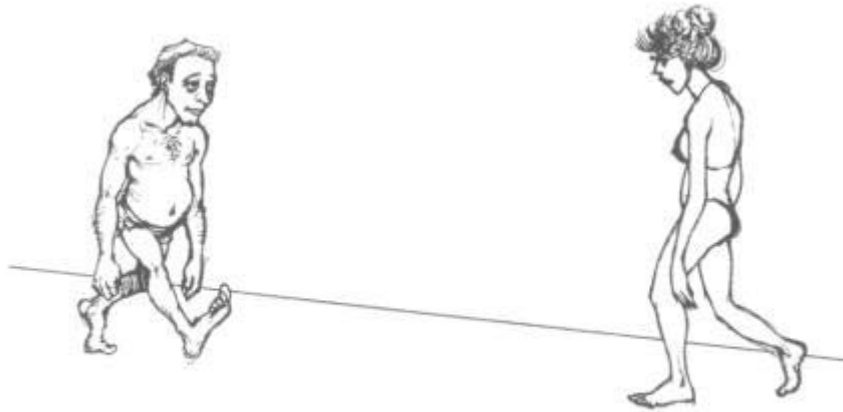


Figure 115 Man and woman approaching on a beach

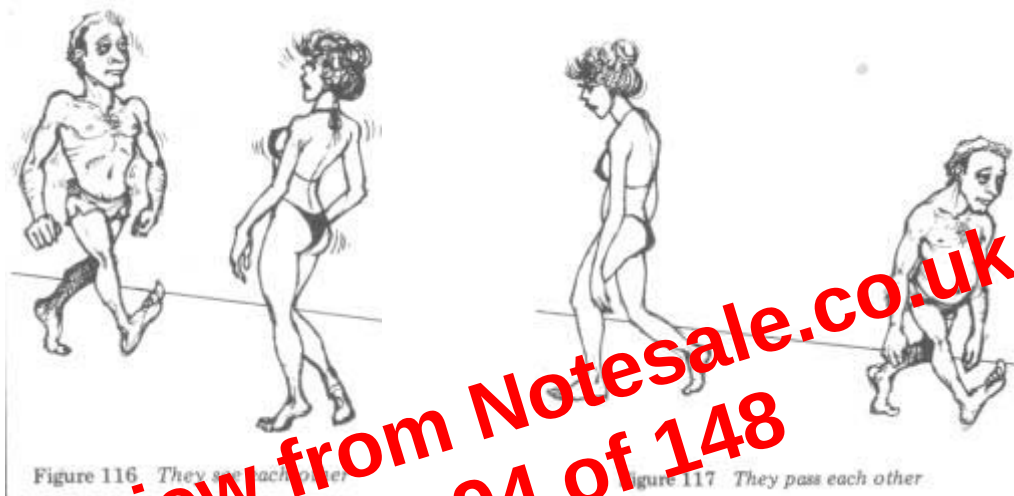


Figure 116 They see each other

Figure 117 They pass each other

While some courtship signals are studied and deliberate, others are given completely unconsciously. How we learn these signals is difficult to explain and a popular theory is that they may be inborn.

Dr Albert Scheflen, in his article 'Quasicourtship behaviour in psychotherapy', noted that, when a person enters the company of a member of the opposite sex, certain physiological changes take place. He found that high muscle tone became evident in preparation for a possible sexual encounter, 'bagging' around the face and eyes decreased, body sagging disappeared, the chest protruded, the stomach was automatically pulled in, pot-bellied slumping disappeared, the body assumed an erect posture and the person appeared to become more youthful in appearance. The ideal place to observe these changes is on a beach when a man and woman approach each other from a distance. The changes take place when the man and woman are close enough to meet each other's gaze and continue until after they have passed each other, at which time the original posture returns (Figures 115 to 117).

MALE COURTSHIP GESTURES

Like most animal species, the human male displays preening behaviour as the female approaches. In addition to the automatic physiological reactions already mentioned, he will reach for his throat and straighten his tie. If he is not wearing a tie, he may smooth his collar or brush imaginary dust from his shoulder and rearrange

The Head Toss

The head is flicked to toss the hair back over the shoulders or away from the face. Even women with short hair may use this gesture.

Exposed Wrists

An interested female will gradually expose the smooth soft skin of her wrists to the potential male partner. The wrist area has long been considered one of the highly erotic areas of the body. The palms are also made visible to the male while she is speaking. Women who smoke cigarettes find this tantalising wrist/palm exposure quite simple to perform while smoking. The exposed wrist and head toss gestures are often mimicked by homosexual males who want to take on a feminine appearance.

Open Legs

The legs are opened wider than they would normally have been if the male had not arrived on the scene. This occurs whether the woman is sitting or standing and contrasts with the sexually defensive female who keeps her legs crossed and together at all times.

Rolling Hips

The hips have an accentuated roll when walking to highlight the pelvic region.

Some of the more subtle female courtship gestures that follow have been used for centuries in advertising to sell goods and services.

Sideways Glance

With partially dropped eyelids, the woman holds the man's gaze just long enough for him to notice then she quickly looks away. This has the tantalising feeling of peeping and being peeped at and can light the fires of most normal men.

Mouth Slightly Open, Wet Lips

Dr Desmond Morris describes this as 'selfmimicry' as it is intended to symbolise the female genital region. The lips can be made to appear wet either by the use of saliva or cosmetics. Both give the woman the appearance of sexual invitation.

Lipstick

When a woman becomes sexually aroused her lips, breasts and genitals become larger and redder as they fill with blood. The use of lipstick is a technique thousands of years old that is intended to mimic the reddened genitals of the sexually aroused female.



Figure 128 *The aggressor*

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people whom they consider inferior. By taking the same posture, you can effectively disconcert them and force them to change their position, allowing you to take the control.

Research shows that when the leader of a group uses certain gestures and positions, subordinates copy them. Leaders also tend to be the first of a group to walk through a doorway and they like to sit on the end of a couch or bench seat rather than in the centre. When a group of executives walk into a room, the boss usually goes first. When executives are seated in the board room, the boss usually sits at the head of the table, often farthest from the door. If the boss sits with a hands-behind-head T-cross gesture (Figure 96), his subordinates will copy.

People who sell to married couples in their home are well advised to watch the couple's gestures, to see who initiates the gestures and who follows.

For example, if the husband is doing all the talking and the wife sits there saying nothing, but you notice that the husband copies his wife's gestures, you will inevitably find that she makes the decisions and writes the cheques, so it is a good idea to direct your presentation to her.

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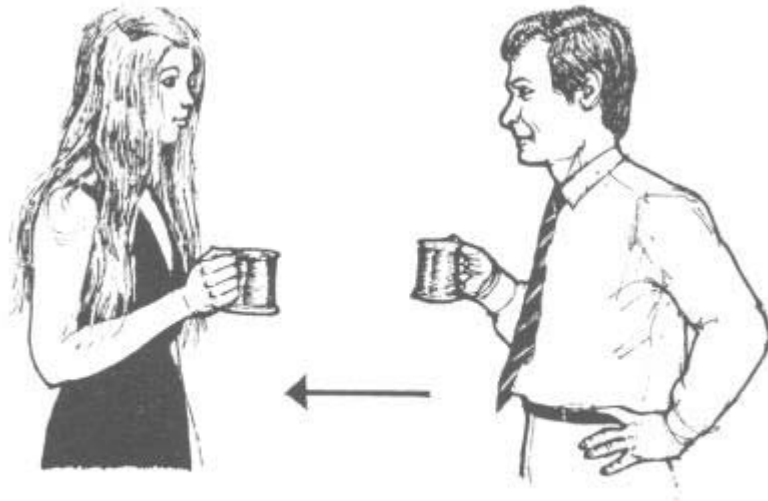


Figure 141 *Direct body pointing in the closed formation*

Inclusion and Exclusion Techniques

Both the open triangular position and the closed position are used to include or exclude another person from the conversation. Figure 142 shows the triangular formation taken by the first two to show acceptance of the third.

When a third person wishes to join two others who are standing in a closed formation, he may be invited to join the conversation only when the other two orient their torsos towards a mutual third point to form the triangle. If the third person is not accepted, the others will hold the closed formation position and turn only their heads towards him or her as a sign of recognition of the third person's presence but the direction of their torsos shows that he is not invited to remain (Figure 143).

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position avoids territorial division on the top of the table. The most successful strategic position from which a sales person can deliver a presentation to a new customer is by position B1 assuming A is the buyer. By simply moving the chair to position B1 you can relieve a tense atmosphere and increase the chances of a favourable negotiation.

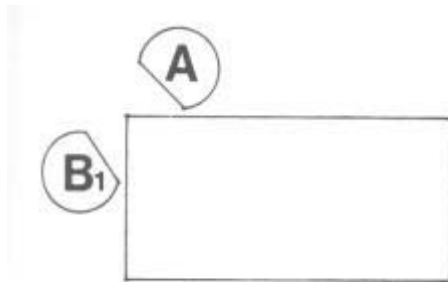


Figure 151 The corner position

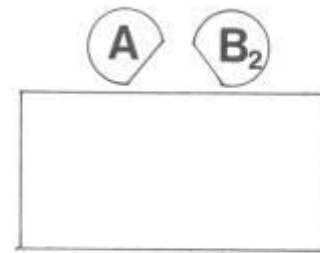


Figure 152 The co-operative position

The Co-operative Position (B2)

When two people are mutually oriented, that is, both thinking alike or working on a task together, this position usually occurs. It is one of the most strategic positions for presenting a case and having it accepted. The trick is, however, for B to be able to take this position without A feeling as though his territory has been invaded. This is also a highly successful position to take when a third party is introduced into the negotiation by B, the sales person. Say, for example, that a sales person was having a second interview with a client and the sales person introduced a technical expert. The following strategy would be most suitable.

The technical expert is seated at position C opposite customer A. The sales person can sit either at position B2 (co-operative) or B1 (corner). This allows the sales person to be 'on the client's side' and to question the technician on behalf of the client. This position is often known as 'siding with the opposition'.

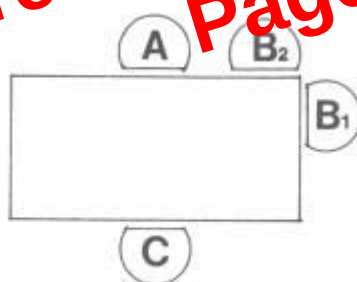


Figure 153 Introducing a third person

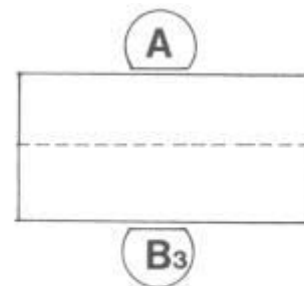


Figure 154 Competitive-defensive position

The Competitive-Defensive Position (B3)

Sitting across the table from a person can create a defensive, competitive atmosphere and can lead to each party taking a firm stand on his point of view because the table becomes a solid barrier between both parties. This position is taken by people who are either competing with each other or if one is reprimanding the other. It can also establish that a superior/subordinate role exists when it is used in A's office.

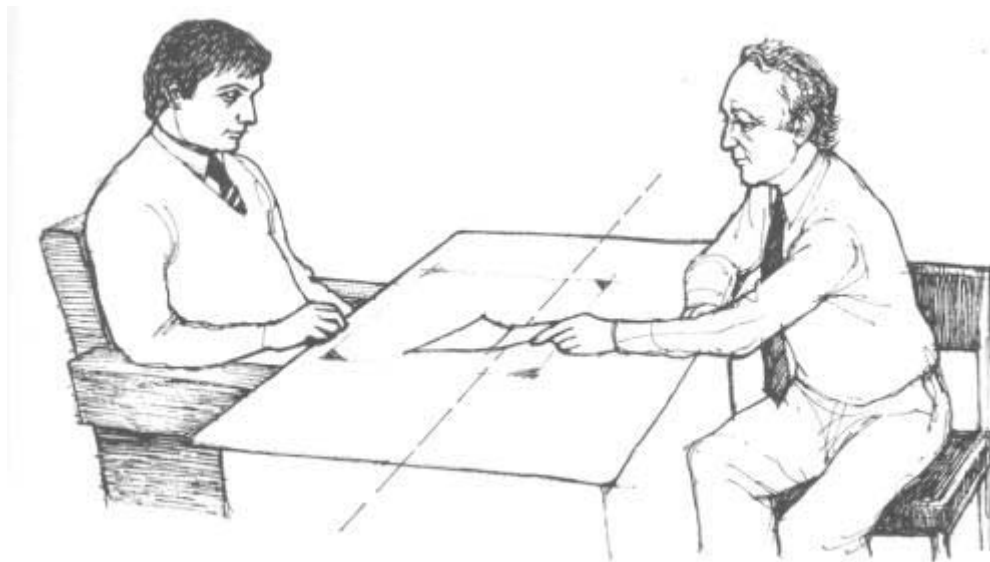


Figure 155 Paper placed on territorial line

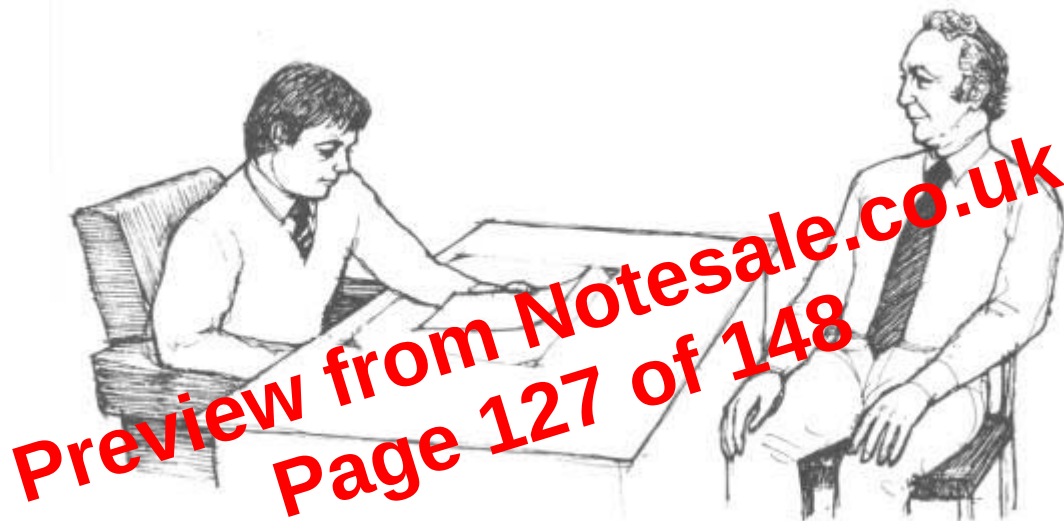


Figure 156 Taking paper into his territory signals non-verbal acceptance

There will be occasions on which it may be difficult or inappropriate to take the corner position to present your case. Let us assume that you have a visual presentation; a book, quotation or sample to present to another person who is sitting behind a rectangular desk. First, place the article on the table (Figure 155). The other person will lean forward and look at it, take it into his territory or push it back into your territory.

If he leans forward to look at it, you must deliver your presentation from where you sit as this action non-verbally tells you that he does not want you on his side of the desk. If he takes it into his territory this gives you the opportunity to ask permission to enter his territory and take either the corner or cooperative positions (Figure 157). If, however, he pushes it back, you're in trouble! The golden rule is never to encroach on the other person's territory unless you have been given verbal or non-verbal permission to do so or you will put them offside.

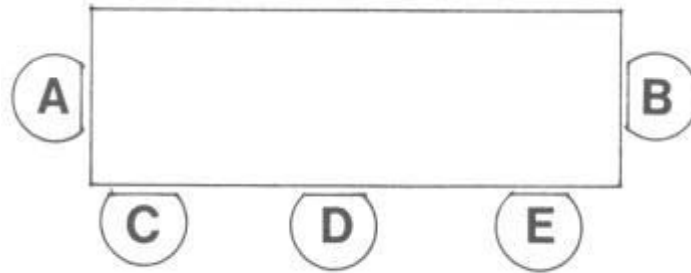


Figure 161 Positioning at a rectangular table

The Dining Table at Home

The choice of the shape of a family dining room table can give a clue to the power distribution in that family, assuming that the dining-room could have accommodated a table of any shape and that the table shape was selected after considerable thought. 'Open' families go for round tables, 'closed' families select square tables and 'authoritative' types select rectangular tables.

GETTING A DECISION OVER DINNER

Bearing in mind what has already been said about human territories and the use of square, rectangular and round tables, let us now look at the dynamics of taking a person to dinner where the objective is to obtain a favourable response to a proposition. Let us examine the factors that can build a positive atmosphere, discuss their origin and potential and examine the background of man's feeding behaviour.

Anthropologists tell us that man's origin was that of a tree-dweller who was strictly vegetarian, his diet consisting of roots, leaves, berries, fruit and the like. About a million years ago, he came out of the trees and the plains to become a hunter of prey. Prior to his becoming a land dweller, man's eating habits were those of the monkeys - involving continual nibbling throughout the day. Each individual was entirely responsible for his own survival and for obtaining his own food. As a hunter, however, he needed the co-operation of other individuals to capture large prey, so large co-operative hunting groups were formed. Each group would leave at sunrise to hunt throughout the day and return at dusk with the day's spoils. These were then divided equally among the hunters, who would eat inside a communal cave.

At the entrance to the cave a fire was lit to ward off dangerous animals and to provide warmth. Each caveman sat with his back against the wall of the cave to avoid the possibility of being attacked from behind while he was engrossed in eating his meal. The only sounds that were heard were the gnashing and gnawing of teeth and the crackle of the fire. This ancient process of food sharing at dusk around an open fire was the beginning of a social event that modern man re-enacts in the form of barbecues, cookouts and dinner parties. Modern man also reacts and behaves at these events in much the same way as he did over a million years ago.

Now to our restaurant or dinner party. A positive decision in your favour is easier to obtain when your prospect is relaxed, free of tension and his or her defensive barriers have been lowered. To achieve this end, and keeping in mind what has already been said about our ancestors, a few simple rules need to be followed.

chair with wheels and he has a telephone with a lock on it. He is also sitting in the defensive/competitive position.

Figure 170 The hands-on-hips gesture is used by the child to make herself appear larger and more threatening. The chin is jutting forward to show defiance and the mouth is opened wide to expose the teeth, just as animals do before they attack.

Figure 169



Figure 171



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Figure 170

Figure 171 This cluster can be summed up in one word - negative. The folder has been used as a barrier and the arms and legs are folded due to nervousness or defensiveness. His coat is buttoned and his sunglasses hide any eye or pupil signals. Much of his face is hidden by his beard, which gives him a suspicious appearance. Considering that people form 90 per cent of their opinion of someone in the first ninety seconds it is unlikely that this man will ever get to first base with another person.

Figure 172 Both men are using aggressive and readiness gestures, the man on the left using the hands-on-hips gesture and the man on the right the thumbs-in-belt. The man on the left is less aggressive than the man on the right as he is leaning backwards and his body is pointing away from the man on the right. The man on the right, however,

holding back his opinion, shown by his selfrestraint gesture of gripping the arms of the chair and locked ankles. He has also issued a non-verbal challenge to the man on the right by pointing his body at him.

Figure 177



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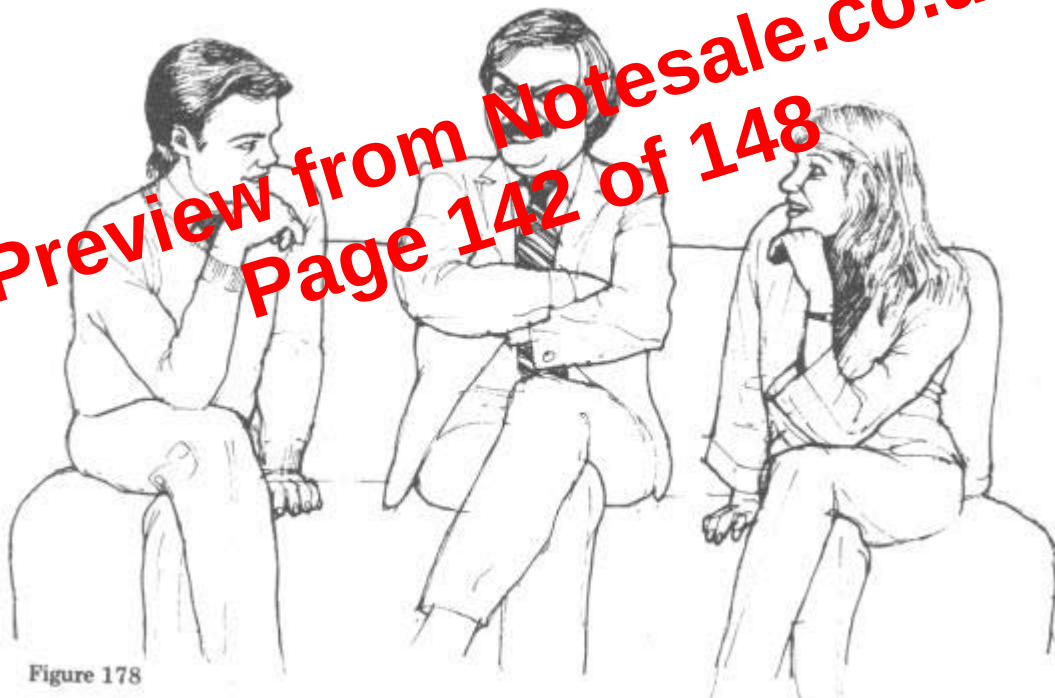


Figure 178

Figure 178 In this scene the man on the left and the woman have mirrored each other's gestures and are forming 'bookends' on the couch. The couple are very interested in each other and have positioned their hands in such a way that they can expose their wrists and they have crossed their legs toward one another. The man in the middle has a tightlipped smile which can make him appear interested in what the other man has to say but it is not consistent with his other facial and body gestures. His head is down (disapproval) his eyebrows are also down (anger) and he is giving the other

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