

Mastering your body language

Have you ever been in a meeting with someone who spent the entire time looking out the window, with their body faced away from the group and their arms crossed?

No prizes for guessing how engaged in the conversation that person was. It's an extreme example, but most people are unaware that even subtle negative body language signals can really damage an important conversation.

And you don't even have to be thinking negative thoughts to be sending negative body language signals. Our body language doesn't discriminate – it can react to changes in temperature, tiredness, and unrelated distractions. But the person you are talking to isn't going to know that – they will just think you at best not interested in what they have to say, and at worst, rude!

We put an enormous effort into making the words that come out of our mouth count. So here are a few things to watch to ensure your body language isn't undermining your hard work.

1. Keep an eye on things

There's no need to stare, which can actually be a little creepy, but holding eye contact for a few seconds at key moments is critical. And if there is more than one person in the room, make sure you don't exclude anyone. People can take it quite personally when they feel someone else is getting more attention, and eye contact is the biggest indicator of this.

2. Mirror the person you are speaking to physically

This may seem obvious but be careful – it can err on the side of strange. Keep it subtle, like small hand gestures and smiling at the same time. You can mirror with your lan-



guage as well, by repeating key words and maintaining the same tone and pace with your speech.

3. Stay open with your body language

Uncross those arms! Keeping your arms

relaxed and at your sides says you are open to the conversation. Same goes for keeping your hands in your pockets or crossed behind your back.

4. Sit up straight

This is a tricky one. Leaning back or

slumping will make you look lazy. But leaning forward too much can be aggressive. Stay neutral by pulling yourself up through your lower back and keep your shoulders relaxed.

5. Don't be a bobble head

Have you ever seen one of those dolls with the heads that bounce around? They are pretty silly aren't they? Well, that's what it looks like when people nod too much. Once or twice is great. Over and over. That's a distraction and just not a good look.

6. Fight the fidgets

Chewing your nails is just unprofessional. But keep an eye on the minor fidgets as well. Like twisting paper clips, doodling on a note pad, twirling your hair and constantly checking your phone. It sends a clear message to the people around you that you are either not interested or you have better things to do with your time.

Don't forget

- Maintain regular eye contact
- Keep it natural – don't nod too much or lean in too close
- Stop doodling. It's really quite rude to see someone drawing pictures on their notepad during a meeting
- Make a connection by subtly mirroring the person you are speaking to

Just do it

Practice makes perfect. Next time you are in a meeting make a note of some of your bad body language habits. Then start addressing them, one at a time, keeping in mind that to make a permanent change you are going to need to practice until it becomes automatic. – www.thenakedceo.com