

What does body language signal at the stand?

No human language is as elementary as our body language – and as frank. Understanding body posture, gestures and facial expressions can thus be of a great advantage – particularly when using our own body language. For a certain body language signal at the right moment can cause wonders.

Negative Gestures

Even “harmless” gestures can be registered as positive or negative, influencing a personal impression without us being aware of them. Pay attention during talks at the exhibition stand, in order to avoid gestures with negative connotations as much as possible.

- Hands that are not visible, e.g. hidden in pockets, behind the back or under the table, do not make a trusting impression.
- Gestures that take place under the waist always have a derogatory message.
- Pointing with the index finger or a pen seems dominant.
- Crossing arms or showing the back of the hand instead of the palm can indicate reserve.
- Gestures of excusing, such as raising the shoulders and lifting the hands with the palms upwards, transmit helplessness and lack of self-confidence.

Positive Gestures

Those who are successful in avoiding negative gestures will be able to make a neutral impression. With the help of certain positive gestures it is not difficult to appear friendly and obliging.

- Your hands should always be visible to transmit security to your conversation partner.
- Gestures that take place above the waist have a positive and enhancing effect.
- In general your gestures should demonstrate openness.

Positive facial expressions

A normal day at an exhibition is very hectic and this stress can easily be seen in people's faces. At the same time the visual impression we make is remembered much longer than the verbal. Most people who are under stress tend to have a bad-tempered facial expression. In such situations putting on a smile can help to reduce mental tension and to achieve a relaxed, friendly appeal. But the smile must be real! Do not just pull the corners of your mouth upwards, but smile with the whole face. Raised cheeks, small wrinkles around the eyes and sunken eyebrows are a sure sign that the cheerfulness is not just feigned.

First impression

We make a judgement on a person we have just met after only a few seconds. This means we should always be concerned to make a first impression that is as good as possible. Strike a self-confident posture, standing upright, raising the chest, looking straight ahead and with a “real” smile, and you are halfway there. The significance of shaking

hands should also not be underestimated.

- A firm handshake signals a firm, self-confident character.
- If a person uses their whole hand when shaking hands, so that the hands grasp each other deeply, then this means: “I am open for everything!” This person does not hold back but is totally committed.
- Those who place their free hand on top of the “greeting” hand of the other person want to express their esteem.

Very important: Be very careful when greeting someone to respect the personal zone of the person opposite you – a distance of at least an arm's length. Arm movements should always proceed upwards from below, not in the opposite direction.

Body language around the world

“Different countries, different customs”, each country and culture has another body language “vocabulary” which you should pay attention to. Greetings alone are performed very differently.

- In Central Europe and Latin America people kiss someone's hand.

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- In Great Britain people simply nod slightly.
- The Chinese bow during greetings.
- In India and South-East Asia one folds the hands.
- Moroccans tend to kiss each other's hand.

The simplest body language signals, nodding and shaking the head, in order to agree or say no, are understood in most parts of the world. Nevertheless there are some cultural exceptions.

In order to signalise agreement, the head is moved back and forth in India, Pakistan and Bulgaria – in Ethiopia however it is thrown back.

- The same gesture – throwing back the head – is a rejecting gesture in Arabian countries, Greece, Turkey and Southern Italy.
- It is possible around the globe to signalise no by waving the index finger or crossing the hands.
- In Southern Italy and Sardinia it is also usual to tap the hand on the chin.
- Fanning with the hand is understood in Japan as a rejecting gesture.

To be on the safe side it is better to do without such gestures if you are not completely sure of their meaning in other cultures – and in general make less gestures.

Monika Matschnig, author and university lecturer, instructs people in her seminars and workshops on how to present themselves convincingly and self-confidently. In addition she leads the seminar “Body language: Impression. Always. Everywhere.” at the German Expert Academy DEAK (www.experten-akademie.de).

