

Nonverbal Communications

It begins even before you say your first word in an interview. By the time the interviewer walks toward you, an opinion is already being formed. There you sit waiting to spew out your answers to questions you've prepared for, while you are already being judged by your appearance, posture, smile or nervous look.

A study done at UCLA a few years ago revealed that the impact of a performance was based on 7 percent of the words used, 38 percent on voice quality and 55 percent on nonverbal communication.

Look back at speakers or teachers you've listened to. Which ones stand out as memorable? The ones who were more animated and entertaining, or the ones that just gave out information? This is not to say that you have to entertain the interviewer (no jokes, please), but it does mean that the conversation should be more interactive. If you say you are excited about the prospect of working for this company but don't show any enthusiasm, your message will probably fall flat. So smile, gesture once in a while, show some energy, and make the experience more pleasurable for both sides.

Nonverbal Pitfalls to Watch For:

- **The handshake:** It's your first encounter with the interviewer. He holds out his or her hand and receives a limp, damp hand in return -- not a very good beginning. Your handshake should be firm -- not bone-crushing -- and your hand should be dry and warm. Try running cold water on your hands when you first arrive at the interview site. Run warm water if your hands tend to be cold. The insides of your wrists are especially sensitive to temperature control.
- **Your posture:** Stand and sit erect. We're not talking "ramrod" posture, but show some energy and enthusiasm. A slouching posture looks tired and uncaring. Check yourself out in a mirror or on videotape.
- **Eye contact:** Look the interviewer in the eye. You don't want to stare, as this shows aggression. Occasionally, and nonchalantly, glance at the interviewer's hand as he is speaking. On the contrary, by constantly looking around the room while you are talking, you convey a lack of confidence or discomfort with what is being discussed.
- **Your hands:** Gesturing or talking with your hands is very natural. Getting carried away with hand gestures can be distracting. Also, avoid touching your mouth while talking. Watch yourself in a mirror while talking on the phone. Chances are you are probably using some of the same gestures in an interview.
- **Don't fidget:** There is nothing worse than someone playing with his or her hair, clicking a pen top, tapping the foot or unconsciously touching parts of the body.

Preparing what you have to say is important, but practicing how you will say it is imperative. The nonverbal message can speak louder than the verbal message you are sending.