

## **Tips for Enhancing your Body Language in Video Meetings**

In today's businesses, there are many types of methods of communication: email, telephone, face-to-face meetings and so on. Videoconferencing is becoming a more common way to communicate between clients, employees and companies – not just to save on travel costs, but to liaise with remote workers or interview international candidates.

Things start to get complicated when each communication method has different etiquette. The goal is always to be professional even though some situations require less formality than others. If you have yet to master video etiquette, you could be unnecessarily putting yourself at a disadvantage when it comes to your communication skills.

Here are some tips on body language and facial expressions to help you look your best in video meetings:

### **1. Sit up straight, but lean forward.**

It should be common knowledge that sitting up straight displays confidence. This is even more important in video interviews because slouching will look exaggerated on camera. That being said, sitting up too straight can make you look stiff. Ground yourself. Plant your feet on the floor and relax – this will help you appear calmer.

Posture can also have an effect on how you interact with your viewers – lean forward as you're communicating. It shows interest and engagement as well as a readiness to listen. Leaning forward can also put your viewer at ease. Beware not to move around too much as you risk appearing blurry on screen.

### **2. Keep your gestures open and neutral.**

Perhaps you are a very animated person and you talk with your hands often. Maybe you are the opposite – reserved and relaxed. When it comes to videoconferencing, the key is to find a happy medium between the two. With little screen space, the key is to keep your movements controlled, natural, and meaningful.

Any gestures with your palms open and exposed show openness and a willingness to negotiate. On the other hand (no pun intended), people tend to keep their palms down when displaying authority or certainty. It implies that you feel strongly about what you're saying.

Keep your hands away from your face. Psychologist Paul Ekman, expert in facial expressions and emotion, calls these actions manipulators. These gestures reveal nervousness and are often performed in order to comfort oneself. When we see people touch their face or cover their mouths, we instinctively feel distrustful of them.

### **3. Make your body neutral in size and orientation.**

Similar to the hand gestures, open arm movements are read positively. They imply that you have nothing to hide. However, too wide and it can appear that you are attempting to dominate. In the same way animals puff up their chests when trying to scare away predators, humans take up more space when they want to appear powerful.

Ekman calls these actions emblems. He believes they are the only true 'body language' because they have a precise meaning and are understood by all members of a particular culture or subculture. For example, raising your arms above your head in victory indicates pride – an emblem that can even be seen executed by people who have been blind since birth.

Don't shrink either. If you try to make yourself appear small, it is understood as fear, uncertainty or helplessness. You can use these emblems in 'fragments' to make an impression: for example, lean forward slightly while placing your hands wide on the table in front of you to emphasise a point.

#### **4. Be aware of your facial expressions.**

The face is one of the most telling sites of a person's feelings. Many facial expressions are universal, including happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust, and in some scientific circles, contempt. This means that across all cultures, the way the emotion is displayed on the face is the same and can be reliably recognised by most members of humanity. That means your face is where the critical action is happening.

Smile when appropriate but don't force it. People can easily tell when a smile is faked.

Nod while you speak if you're trying to convince someone of something. [Scientists have observed](#) that people are more likely to agree with a point if they nod while they are listening to it. People also mimic those they like, so if you've been making a positive impression your viewers will nod if you are nodding.

Beware of furrowing your eyebrows – it can indicate disagreement or confusion. Keep your face neutral, especially when others are speaking.

You may have heard the term microexpressions – you needn't worry about these. This is a concept pioneered by Paul Ekman in which humans show for an instant (fractions of a second) an involuntary facial expression that reveals an emotion they are trying to hide. Ekman's research has shown that less than 1% of the population can detect these microexpressions without prior training.

#### **5. Maintain eye contact.**

Eye contact is crucial when it comes to nonverbal communication, and this can be hard to perform in a video meeting. To 'look into someone's eyes' you should look into the camera instead. This gives the appearance that you are looking at them while you're speaking. If you're prone to looking at the screen, try to move your face closer to the camera. Don't be afraid to break 'eye contact' and look at your notes if it is what you would do naturally.