

## Body Language 89

### Clusters

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I have been studying body language since my wife bought me a book on it in 1979. There is still much to learn, and you never can know it all.

We sometimes get fooled when observing another person's body language. That can happen for a number of reasons. Here are a few of them:

1. The person may be from a different culture or background from us.
2. We fail to take into account what is happening around the BL signal – the context.
3. We rely on a single gesture to imply full meaning rather than clusters.
4. The gestures we are seeing are not consistent with the words the person is using.

The third point is the topic of this article. Looking at a single gesture and applying meaning has a significant danger for misinterpretation.

If you are observing another person making three or more gestures that are all consistent, then your chances of accurately decoding the emotion being conveyed are greatly increased.

For example, If I see a person with raised eyebrows, I might interpret it as worry or anxiety. That may or may not be true. People raise their eyebrows for a number of reasons.

However, if I witness a person who is shuffling weight from one foot to the other while putting a finger in his collar and moving it back and forth while simultaneously showing a frown with the mouth and raised eyebrows, I can be quite certain this person is experiencing anxiety.

Let's look at another example. Suppose I see a woman whose eyebrows are furrowed. I may assume she is angry, and that could be the case. But, if I also witness her with flared nostrils, hands on her hips, shoulders back, chin jutting forward, I had better get ready to do some serious groveling.

Another trick is to observe the fleeting gestures, also called “micro expressions.” These gestures happen so quickly we might even miss them if we are not on the alert.

A micro expression may be as short as 1/30<sup>th</sup> of a second. Observing a series of micro expressions that all point in the same direction is a great way to improve the accuracy of reading the body language signals.

I will share an example of a micro expression using myself as the guinea pig. Here is a link to a short (10 minute) video I once did on [“Planting a Seed of Trust in the First 10 Seconds.”](#)

Note: The material on shaking hands in this video no longer applies until conditions with COVID-19 change, but you can see a great example of a micro expression at 4 minutes and 46 seconds into the video.

At that point in the video, I am talking about ways to show your eagerness to meet the other person.

I first describe your body language if you are really positive and have a good feeling when approaching the other person. I then go on to explain the negative side, if you are not particularly happy about meeting this person.

Just before going with the negative side, I pull my mouth tight and to the side. It is only for a fraction of a second, but that gesture is a micro expression that signals that I am moving from a positive frame of mind to a negative one.

When I was making the video, I had no knowledge that I was making a micro expression. It was only when I reviewed the video later that I saw the gesture.

It is typical that we are conscious of only a tiny fraction of the body language signals we are sending to others. Observing all of the body language signals that are coming in, including the micro expressions will enhance your ability to detect a cluster.

You also need to consider that a person can be experiencing multiple emotions at the same time. For example, a person may be feeling embarrassed with a hint or regret or even grief. That would allow for multiple signals to be sent simultaneously. The permutations are countless.

Get in the habit of looking for auxiliary clues when witnessing emotions expressed through body language. If you make a conscious effort to look for multiple signals, you will gain strength in this important life skill.

*This is a part in a series of articles on “Body Language” by Bob Whipple “The Trust Ambassador.”*

