

## Body Language 92

### Plastic People

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Way back in the 1960's there was a group led by Frank Zappa called The Mothers of Invention. Their sound was a kind of punk rock that had little structure or melody, but they were popular for a time due to their grotesque appearance and sound.

I recall one song they did called "Plastic People." The recurring line in the song was "Plastic people. Oh baby now you're such a drag."

Probably many readers of this blog were not even alive in the 1960s, so the title has no context for them. With body language, you do sometimes run into plastic people who may choose to not show much emotion through their facial or body configurations.

Also, you may find some people who are expert at putting on an expression that effectively masks their true emotions. I believe that when people try to hide our true feelings, there is a kind of incongruence to their body language that is a tip off that the person is hiding something.

There are numerous physical and psychological conditions that may prevent a person from showing his or her true feelings in body language. It is not the purpose of this article to enumerate all the combinations that can lead to a person show very little emotion.

I do want to share some ideas on how you might attempt to draw out a person, but recognize that in many situations, the best approach is to just leave the person alone. The correct approach will depend on the person and the current situation.

You probably know someone in your circle of friends who is expert at giving almost no body language information about what is going on in his or her brain. It can be very disconcerting. What can you do in a case like that? Start with listening and observing.

You might try a direct approach and say something like, "I am finding it hard to read your feelings at the moment." That would potentially annoy the other person if he or she is just attempting to be private.

Another approach is to engage the person in some dialog by asking Socratic Questions. You would need to do this carefully in order to avoid talking down to the person or some other form of insulting dialog that might be interpreted as openly prying.

The need to keep one's emotions private may be for a number of different reasons, but I suspect a common one is insecurity. The person may have opened up in the past only to get hurt rather badly. So, from that point on this person would guard his or her emotions rather closely and not give out a lot of information.

Short of trying to psychoanalyze the root cause of this situation, you are better off just letting the person be circumspect. Let the other person decide whether he or she wants to make a change.

Another thing you could try is to just be kind and gentle with the person.

If you notice that the person is able to be more human around certain people, dig into why that might be. It could be that your approach is too direct or even threatening.

We all have a tendency to warm up to some people more than others. You may remind the person of another individual who has tangled with him or her in the past. If so, that can be a cause of the withdrawal.

When dealing with a person who is consciously trying to be a plastic person, you need to use patience and emotional intelligence. Do not try to fix the situation quickly, but pay attention to any signals given out that may provide some insight.

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