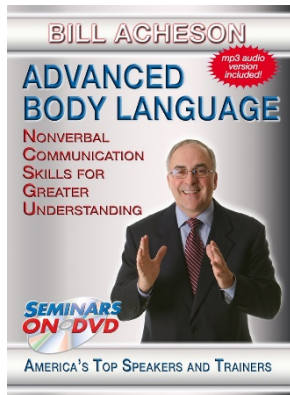


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Lasting Relationships

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



For the final few articles in this series on body language, I am highlighting some of the excellent content in a program entitled [“Advanced Body Language”](#) by Bill Acheson of the University of Pittsburgh.

In this article, I will summarize his research on Forming Lasting Relationships quickly. I dealt with this topic from my own observations in an earlier article entitled [“Planting a Seed of Trust in the First 10 Seconds.”](#) Bill’s take on the subject parallels my remarks and goes deeper in some areas.

First of all, Bill says that we form a first impression of another person extremely fast, and it is based on three factors that we judge very quickly: 1) Trustworthiness, 2) Competence, and 3) Likability.

Trustworthiness

The first observation is that you cannot project trustworthiness verbally. It must be done with some form of action or gesture where you are demonstrating that you will do exactly what you say. You will not spin the truth and will be transparent with information.

That is kind of a difficult thing to do when first meeting an individual, so let me share an example from my own background. I once met a person who said he was interested in the topic of trust.

I was a speaker at a conference, and this individual approached me. I told him that I had an article I would send to him that had great content to answer one of his questions. I asked him for his card, and he saw me write down a message to myself on the back to send him that particular article.

This little gesture let him know he could count on me to follow through, so my trustworthiness level likely went up in his mind.

Competence

Here, Bill quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said, “What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.” Another way to say that is, “Actions speak louder than words.”

He makes the observation that men have the ability to project personal power in a business setting with greater accuracy than women. He describes several male behaviors that signal personal power. For example, if a man sits with noticeably relaxed muscle tone, it demonstrates absence of fear. Lack of fear is coupled with trust, so it is a gesture that connotes power and security.

A backward body lean is another indication of being relaxed, which translates into a gesture associated with personal power. This is also true for body asymmetry with one hand up and the other hand down.

Another example is expansiveness; he takes up a lot of room. He spreads things out on the table in front of himself or sits in a meeting with his arm on an adjacent chair.

A third give away is sitting with legs crossed in what is known as the “aristocratic leg cross” with one leg on top of the other rather than an ankle to the knee, which is how the majority of men sit. Bill cites that for men over the age of 45, only 12% of them will sit with one leg atop the other. Bill says it is the single most accurate predictor of high social status and high net worth.

For women to project personal power, Bill makes three observations. The first is that hair and power are inversely proportional. As women move into positions of higher power, they tend to cut their hair shorter and closer to the head.

A second observation is that women, when projecting personal power, often do what is called a “reverse steeple” with their hands. Men will often steeple with finger tips together pointing upward and palms apart. The female power position is with fingers together pointing downward and palms apart.

He says the dichotomy between attractiveness and power means that to increase one, you tend to reduce the other; “It’s a zero-sum game.” The implication here is that for a woman to project personal power she will often sacrifice some femininity.

Likability

Here, the issue revolves around communication style. Bill notes that in study after study the highest rated communicator says the fewest number of words. He makes a very strong statement that “You are now, and you will continue to be paid based on your ability to LISTEN.”

He suggests that the most important behavior for a listener is silence. It is so obvious that we tend to forget.

He said that in order to generate instant rapport with an individual you are just meeting, just walk up and give a four-word command: "Tell me about yourself." Then shut up and listen.

Bill also points out that when meeting another person, you want to maintain roughly 70-80% eye contact. Less than 70% eye contact and the other person will not trust you. He stresses that it is important to break eye contact at least once a minute. To stare at another person for more than a minute, it is creepy and actually can destroy trust.

These points are quite similar to the ones I have anecdotally observed myself, but Bill has done enough research to back up the theory with data.

Not all of the points mentioned here apply in all situations. As with all body language, there is room for individual differences, and the magnitude of the gestures will depend on the specific situation.

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