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Successful Nonverbal Communication

Principles and Applications

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To Nancy
*who is the ultimate source
of inspiration and love*

PREFACE

Successful Nonverbal Communication is written for the introductory course in nonverbal communication. To be more specific, this book is written for the students who take and instructors who teach the introductory course in nonverbal communication. This is a course that I have taught for a number of years. This experience has convinced me that there is a need for a book that is directly responsive to the concerns of this audience. As a result, I have asked many students and instructors of introduction to nonverbal communication to describe in detail the book that they would like to see written for this course. *Successful Nonverbal Communication* is the book that they described.

Serious students of nonverbal communication have long recognized that knowledge of nonverbal communication gives them the potential to be much more effective communicators. A source of frustration has remained, however. Most existing books on nonverbal communication focus exclusively on the nature of nonverbal communication. They describe and classify different kinds of nonverbal messages. They do not address the pressing need to *demonstrate how knowledge of the informational potential of nonverbal cues can be used to communicate successfully in the real world*. *Successful Nonverbal Communication* is designed specifically to meet that central need.

The title of the book reflects my conviction that knowledge about nonverbal communication is not enough. We must know *how* to use that knowledge to communicate successfully in applied settings of particular concern to us. Chapter 12, for example, serves to illustrate the applied emphasis of the book that is reflected in the title. This chapter not only provides concrete guidelines for communicating effectively in the job interview but also prioritizes the kinds of nonverbal cues associated with the successful interview.

Part I of this book identifies and describes the different classes of nonverbal cues, illustrates the desirable and undesirable functions they can serve, and provides original tests that can be used to measure and develop nonverbal communication skills. The seven chapters in Part I examine the

research literature with the objective of identifying central principles of effective nonverbal communication.

Parts II and III demonstrate how these principles can be used by the individual communicator. Part II demonstrates how individuals can use the information in Part I to develop their communicative skills, and, more particularly, to project a desired image. Thus, separate chapters in this section are devoted to the subject of selling yourself nonverbally, detecting deception, communicating consistently, and impression formation and management.

Finally, Part III is designed to demonstrate how knowledge of nonverbal communication can be used by the reader to communicate more successfully in applied settings of particular importance. Separate chapters are devoted to nonverbal determinants of successful interviews, female-male interaction, successful intercultural communication, and to the communicative impact of microenvironmental variables in the classroom, conference room, and office.

The readers of this book learn how to use detailed knowledge of nonverbal cues and their communicative functions to communicate more successfully in a variety of real world contexts. Readers can assess the appropriateness of their own nonverbal communication by applying detailed sets of behavioral guidelines. These guidelines represent an operational definition of successful nonverbal communication.

The guidelines pinpoint the nonverbal communicative behaviors that are associated with success in detecting deception, formulating consistent messages, making favorable first impressions and more enduring impressions, interacting with members of the opposite sex, and communicating with members of another culture. In short, the guidelines specify how knowledge of nonverbal communication should be used.

To derive maximum value from this book, instructors and students can make use of the instructional aids provided in the *Instructor's Manual* (available upon request of instructors from Macmillan Publishing Company). This manual features a course syllabus for a semester and a quarter course, in-class and out-of-class exercises that can be used to explore the theoretical and practical implications of concepts discussed in the book, and detailed summaries of the content of each chapter with sets of key terms that can be used to review for examinations.

For purposes of preparing examinations on the book, detailed sets of true-false and multiple choice items on each chapter are included along with long and short-answer essay questions. Finally, the *Instructor's Manual* also includes an enumeration of films, videotapes, and outside readings that can be used to explore and demonstrate how knowledge of nonverbal cues should be used to communicate more successfully.

The book and the *Instructor's Manual* fully explore the central role that nonverbal cues frequently play in the development and deterioration of interpersonal relationships, in shaping interpersonal perceptions, in personal selling, and in the development of a positive self-concept. Because of this focus, I believe that *Successful Nonverbal Communication* can be

particularly valuable as one of the required textbooks in introductory courses in subjects such as interpersonal communication, personal selling, and business communication.

A number of individuals made noteworthy contributions to this book. Chris Maxwell played a central role as research assistant and author of the *Instructor's Manual*. Derek Yaniger deserves full credit for the creative cartoons and line drawings that illustrate concepts in the book. Jim Morgenthaler, who did outstanding work on an earlier book of mine, did the photographs and photographic displays. He even risked life and limb by invading a local pasture to take the photograph of the cow that appears in Chapter 2. The five scholars who did the substantive reviews of the manuscript deserve special thanks for their shrewd and helpful criticism: Barbara A. Larson, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Steven A. Rollman, James Madison University; H. Dan O'Hair, Texas Christian University; Dennis S. Gouran, Pennsylvania State University and Gail E. Myers, Trinity University. Finally, I would like to thank Lloyd Chilton at Macmillan, for his valuable insights and guidance. He is an extraordinarily fine editor and person.

On a very personal level, my wife Nancy was, once again, the source of much inspiration and love. Cat₂ is now much older and wiser than he was when I wrote my earlier book on nonverbal communication systems. This time he refused to inspect the manuscript on a daily basis or even to serve as paper weight on windy days. He did, however, agree to look at the page proofs of the manuscript.

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PART ONE

Nonverbal Communication

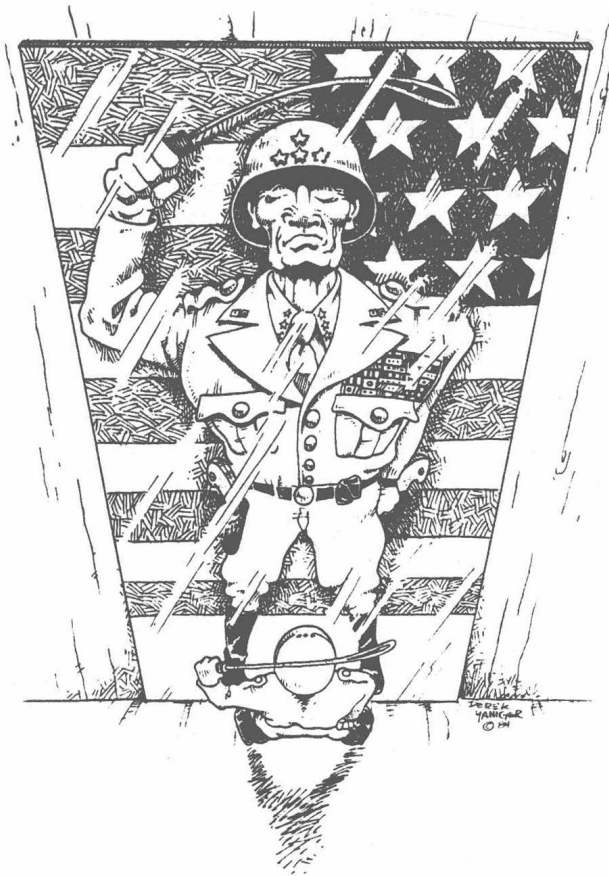
The Nature of Nonverbal Communication

Human interaction is a quest for meaning. We look anxiously to others to determine whether we have communicated our intended meaning. We are concerned that we may have communicated unintended meanings that will negatively affect the image we wish to project. If we are skilled in the art of impression management, we may cultivate a certain look or sound that is designed to control the judgments that people make about us. Thus, General George Patton practiced his "war face" in front of a mirror so that he would be perceived as unusually determined, powerful, and brave. Richard Nixon made repeated attempts to eliminate the shifty eye behaviors and nonfluencies that helped reinforce the widespread public perception that he was "Tricky Dicky."

Those individuals with whom we communicate are also on guard. They look apprehensively at us, to judge whether they have accurately perceived our intentions. Do our communicative behaviors accurately reflect our inner feelings, or do they represent a carefully controlled presentation of self? The quest for meaning often produces, or results in, anxiety, apprehension, and uncertainty. This is so because interpersonal communication is so complex.

The ways we communicate meanings are varied. And the sources of error in interpersonal communication are multiple. A single error may make us uncomfortable in an important situation. Multiple errors may be catastrophic.

Consider the following situations. You and your partner are at a fraternity party, on your first date. As the evening progresses and the second keg of beer is tapped, you notice that your date's hand is resting lightly on your arm; a strong and rather rapid pulse is detectable. You make your judgments as to what your date is communicating to you. Later, you fidget on



the doorsteps of the sorority house. Suddenly, you lean forward to kiss your date, but she turns her face away from you, recoils, and walks briskly into the sorority house. You are left alone, to ponder the complexities of the evening's communication situation.

Four years later, you are about to be interviewed by the head of a major advertising firm. The job interview is vitally important to you. You realize that you must communicate very effectively if you are to get the job offer. As you enter the interview room, you introduce yourself to the advertising executive and she offers you a seat on the other side of a small table. You feel that it is important to sustain eye contact, and attempt to do so. The executive often looks away from you as she speaks, however. She frequently leans far back in her chair. You think you are doing well. As the interview concludes, you cannot help but notice that the advertising executive has her chin tilted up into the air and is looking down at you over

her glasses. While looking at you, she remarks that she has found your dossier to be most unusual. You are then left alone to ponder the complexities of the afternoon's communication situation.

These two situations may be interpreted in a number of different ways. Your goal is to determine what meanings you communicated and what meanings were communicated to you. To achieve such a goal you must recognize at least two facts. First, great differences often exist between the meaning you think you communicated and the meaning that was actually perceived. Second, meanings may be communicated through a great variety of channels.

You may have interpreted your date's hand on your arm as an invitation to more intimate behavior later in the evening; the quickened pulse may have suggested a certain amount of arousal on her part. Her perception of the situation may have been quite different. The hand on your arm could have been a sympathetic response to your nervous mannerisms. The quickened pulse may have been triggered by her apprehension as to what actions you would take on the sorority steps. You need more information and more time before attempting a thorough analysis of this situation.

The job situation is also difficult to interpret. You have more facts at your disposal, however. You wisely focused on important factors in this situation. You should not be disturbed by the fact that the interviewer looked away from you as she spoke; this is characteristic eye behavior in an interview situation. You should be concerned about her tendency to lean far back in the chair. Body lean is the best indicator of an individual's involvement in this situation. Your biggest problem is the ambiguous message your interviewer conveyed to you (her chin was perceptibly tilted in the air as she said, "I find your dossier to be most unusual"). The verbal and nonverbal cues convey conflicting meanings. Unhappily for you, the nonverbal cue—the upraised chin, in this case—is apt to be a much more accurate indicator of your interviewer's true feelings than the verbal cue.

Both situations emphasize what society has been slow to recognize: human beings do not communicate by words alone. Individuals have many sensory mechanisms that play a vital role in interpersonal communication. Undeniably, we speak and hear, but we also move and touch and feel. As a communicator, we have a multidimensional capacity.

Some publications have drawn public attention to nonverbal communication. Books such as *Here Comes Everybody*, by William Schutz (1971), and *Body Language*, by Julius Fast (1970), have served a useful purpose. They may have had some undesirable side effects, however. They may have helped to create the misleading notion that knowledge of nonverbal communication is chiefly useful to investigate and invigorate a communicator's sex life. Schutz (1971) notes that "when a group gets advanced and comfortable and trusting with each other, even deeper body concerns can be dealt with. In groups for couples we will often ask them to use a speculum to examine the interior of the vagina" (p. 168). Similarly, Fast (1970) talks in some detail about the meaning transmitted non-