

# Using Body Language as a Sales Tool

## Reference Guide of Helpful Tips

### Managing Your Hands

Communication expert Chris Bowden refers to something called the “**truth plane**” as an ideal place to have your hands and to express yourself with honesty. The truth plane is the **area around the middle of your abdomen, above your navel**. If you keep your hands in front of that area, you appear more trustworthy. It allows you to keep your elbows close to the side of your body and to use your hands to gesture in front of you.

If your hands are **too high** and obscure your face or throat, that could signal that you are not being honest. If your hands move **too far** from your body, it could be a signal that you are getting desperate to make your case or close the sale. If your hands are clasped in front in a **downward manner**, in front of your genitals, this can signal that you are feeling vulnerable or have something to hide (as if you are protecting yourself).

If you use your hands in a **symmetric pattern**, it is a more trustworthy signal than having your hands do different things

Keep your hands **in front of your abdomen** for the best results, using them to emphasize without saying too much. You can fold your hands together in that position or put fingertips from one hand against the other to express yourself. Just be conscious if they start moving too much and distract from the conversation.

### Managing Your Legs and Feet

If you think for a moment about the people you normally see, what are their legs doing? More importantly, **what are your legs doing?**

Someone who sits with their legs well apart is displaying dominance. Some people sit facing their customers as if they had turned a chair around and were sitting across the back of it. The other extreme of this gesture is to sit with the knees together and ankles crossed. Both are equally submissive gestures.

You have to **sit in a way that is comfortable** for you, of course. More importantly, you also need to sit in a way that is also comfortable for your client or customer. This means that you should avoid a gaping view of your crotch. As well, keep your legs comfortable, but no wider than about six inches or so, unless you are trying to aggressively control the conversation.

**We recommend not crossing your ankles**, even for women, since this can appear submissive. This may also expose the sole of your shoes, which is rude in some cultures. As well, keep in mind that the bottoms of our shoes are often dusty or dirty. Showing the bottom of your dirty shoe in contrast to your polished suit sends a mixed message at best. Sit so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you tend to channel nervous energy through your legs by fidgeting or jiggling, you need to get that under control. Practice some **relaxation techniques** so that they do not see – or feel – your leg jiggling under the table. Keep calm, at least on the outside.

### Food for Thought

The phrase “getting a leg up” is borrowed from horseback riding. In the absence of a step, fence, or stool to stand on, a rider will ask someone to “give me a leg up” onto the horse. It also means getting an extra edge or advantage.

**What do you do to get a leg up in your sales career?**



### Matching and Mirroring

#### Body Language

It is generally very easy to subtly *match* another person’s body language, such as their posture, breathing rate, and gestures. If they lean back, you might do the same (subtly, a few moments after they do so). Or, you might perform a *reciprocal movement*; that is, if you start tapping your pencil, I might subtly start tapping my foot in the same rhythm.

You might even *mirror* them; if they tilt their head to the left, you might tilt your head to the right. Of course, you should only mirror the aspects of their body language that feel natural to you.

#### Voice Characteristics

Never, ever attempt to do an imitation of a person’s voice or to match their accent. This is almost always insulting. You can, however, mimic some basic voice features, including volume, speed, and tone.

We can’t stress how important it is to use these techniques subtly!

## Pacing Techniques

**Pacing techniques** can help you achieve a deeper level of rapport. Part of pacing is including true statements in your conversation to give more credibility to other statements.

Research shows that you must use at least three true statements in a row for this to work. Hearing several true statements in a row also lowers their guard and makes them more open to agreeing with you.

## Ways to Improve Your Posture

- ✓ Core strengthening exercises focus on your abdominal muscles, lower back, and hips. These can include stretches, yoga, crunches, swimming, etc.
- ✓ Rounded shoulders need support from strengthened weak upper back muscles as well as work on chest muscles, shoulders, laterals, and hips. As the upper back gets stronger and other areas loosen up, your shoulders will naturally move back where they belong.
- ✓ Tilted hips can be corrected with abdominal exercises and exercises that focus on the hamstrings and gluteal muscles.
- ✓ Forward head positioning comes from stooping during prolonged sitting, like we tend to do while watching TV, driving, and working in front of a computer or machinery. Exercise that corrects the weak and tight areas around your neck will allow you to stand and sit so that your ears are in line with your shoulders.

NOTE: Make sure to check with your doctor before beginning any exercise regime.

## The Eyes Have It!

The **eyes** are often referred to as the most expressive part of our face. Eyes will react to a variety of stimuli and some of these reactions are involuntary. If you ever wondered how, as a youth, your parents caught you in a lie, it might have had to do with the size of your pupils, which can dilate during a lie. (Of course, there are plenty of other reasons for your pupils to dilate, including an adrenaline event.)

Even a slight squint can impact what the listener sees on your face. Are you lying? Or do you need glasses?

## Five Factors for Handshaking Success

### Degree of Firmness

Your grip should be firm and friendly. A weak handshake is a really poor form of introduction, so you need to aim for something that portrays confidence but won't hurt the other person. Be considerate if you are shaking hands with someone in a receiving line and has many more hands to shake, someone wearing a lot of rings, or someone who is obviously elderly and perhaps fragile.

### Dryness of Hand

We all prefer to shake a hand that is dry, but some of us also sweat more than others. While you typically don't want to obviously dry your hands before greeting someone, it is perfectly acceptable (and even expected) to wipe your hands on a napkin if you have been holding a cold glass or eating at a cocktail party.

### Depth of Grip

A handshake should be completed palm to palm. Place your hand so that the web between your thumb and forefinger meets the web of the other person's hand briefly. Your hands should remain perpendicular (straight up and down) to the ground. If your palm is facing up, this may be construed as a sign of submissiveness. If your palm is on top, it can be seen as a sign of aggressiveness. Avoid merely grasping fingers, which is a sign of weakness.

### Duration of Grip

The perfect handshake lasts for about three seconds. You can gently pump once or twice but it is not necessary. Pull back your hand after that contact, even if you are still talking.

### Eye Contact

In North America, we expect the person shaking our hand to make eye contact with us, but this varies from one culture to another.

## Know Your Audience!

You might be used to both **eyebrows** going up when someone reacts with surprise. However, the Inuit in Northern Canada use the same movement to indicate "yes." (They do not nod up and down as we frequently see in North America and other areas.)

In fact, the idea of **nodding** to say yes is NOT universal. In some countries, like Thailand, Laos, and the Philippines, the non-verbal signal for "yes" is tossing the head backward. In Greece, nodding your head up and down means "no" (as it does in several regions in the Middle East).

Likewise, **handshakes** are not a universal custom. Many Orthodox Jewish men and women do not touch members of the opposite sex or non-Jewish members of the same sex. Muslim women are not permitted to shake hands with men outside of their immediate family and should not be pressured by us to extend their hand.

Make sure you know your client's customs and check with a travel guide to get things right.