



# Communication Culture

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## WORD-FREE COMMUNICATION STARTER TOOL KIT

NOT FLUENT in the local language? Shy? This doesn't prevent you from understanding or transmitting messages. As humans, we can not, NOT communicate and we desire communication.

When you don't have the advantage of the local language, or the ability to use a common language, however, it is useful to be aware of non-verbal messages. It is generally accepted that only 7% of communication is through the words we choose. A full 93% relies on tone and body language.

Here are a few of our tools for interpersonal communication without words. See if you have already naturally used them to interpret messages in your own language or another:

### Face

In North America we expect direct eye contact. It establishes a sense of trust and we feel we can detect untruths or lack of sincerity because we believe the face reveals what is really being said.

Covering the face with fingers while listening or speaking might indicate something is being hidden. Making faces or supporting the face with hands might indicate impatience or doubt about the message being heard. We like visible faces to gauge the many muscles messages.

What needs to be considered are colleagues for whom direct eye contact is not culturally comfortable or sometimes permitted. As facial muscles tell their own story, we are generally most confident when the face and eyes match each other as well as the message. Otherwise, we don't feel that we are on the same 'page of intent'. The message may be suspect.

### Voice

Voice components such as tone; convey interest, attention, sincerity or other emotions. An unnaturally high voice or one that quavers or cracks, no eye contact, and no matching face do not support confidence in a person's message. Ever noticed how your level of trust in a person's ability or sincerity the more their voice goes up at the end of a sentence?

This thinning of the voice and higher note at the end of a sentence gives an impression of insecurity or lack of conviction of the speaker. Young people and women in particular have this challenge. Listen for the rise at the end of a sentence.

Doesn't it signal a question to you? The tendency is to rule out the speaker as a 'light weight' who seems to be asking permission or for some validation, rather than delivering a statement of fact.

Speed of speech, should be adjusted to convey focus and attention on the person being spoken to. Clear, unrushed speech allows a person to absorb your phrases. It shows an interest as well as respect to the effort of communication. Given the many possible cultural and geographic origins of people speaking even one language, steady and attentive is the way to the most successful sending and receiving of a message that is mutually understood!

### Silence

Silence can speak volumes. Giving a person enough time to formulate a response and express themselves affirms that you are experiencing the other person. New Canadians often say people ask how they are but don't really wait for the answer and therefore appear as if they don't really care.

You may have noticed that North Americans might simply respond, "I'm great" or, "Fine thanks" to the question, "Hey, how are you?" Culturally, they offer the greeting and question but are not likely to give, nor do they want, a long answer. Deeper connections naturally, warrant deeper communications.

### Gestures

Gestures somehow paint a picture and 'punctuate' the message. Facial expressions and the tone you use help build rapport. People gesture with their hands in a variety of ways or may do so in combination with shoulders that shrug or sink or move along with twisted lips, or puckered ones, or ones that allow sounds of joy or exasperation to escape.

Even a subtle movement of an eyebrow can indicate a great deal of information, such as; doubt, surprise or a happy response. Closing the eyes, rolling them may emphasize relief, frustration or dread. Read carefully. If you are confused, ASK. Clear communication is the goal no matter what the mode. Right?

**VIP:** Your very important point to wrap up with is that, ultimately, rapport is a strong measure of success in communication. It means you are working for mutual understanding. When you are in rapport, each party feels understood, or accepted. At the very least they feel heard and that keeps the communication channels open.

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