

Non-Verbal Communication & Conflict Resolution

What it is & what students can do about it

What is Non-Verbal Communication?

Non-Verbal Communication gives cues about thoughts and feelings before we are fully cognizant of them ourselves. This can be intentional or unintentional, but it is often instinctual. Studies find that almost 70% of all communication is non-verbal and people are more than likely unaware of their non-verbal behavior.

Non-verbal cues can take form in behaviors such as:

- Reduction of eye contact
- Changes in posture
- Head shakes
- Lip biting
- Arm crossing
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- The way you take up physical space when speaking

These non-verbal behaviors and cues can contradict what you think is expected of you in situations such as in the workplace, with superiors, and when in emotional conversations.

What can you do about Non-Verbal Communication?

Most people follow the "Actions speak louder than words" rule. It is necessary to be actively aware of your non-verbal communication because, unlike much verbal communication, you cannot amend what cues you set off and the perception the other person created.

So, what can you do to help control these behaviors?

- **Practice hyperawareness of your physical responses:** Take some time to figure out some of your most common non-verbal reactions. Then, practice becoming aware of when they come up in certain situations.
- **Become familiar with others' perceptions of your non-verbal communication:** Talk with your peers, family members, or anyone you are comfortable with and get their input

about your common reactions. This can help you become more aware of the signals you are sending unintentionally and help you work towards de-escalating situations.

- **Actively listen:** When you practice active listening you aim to listen first without forming a response immediately. Give the person your full attention, attempt to empathize with what they are saying, then try rephrasing and summarizing what they said. This process not only helps you to slow down and control your initial response, but it also shows the other person that you are making an effort to understand the issue and find a solution.

Remember, these behaviors have the potential to disrupt or even end conversations before anything is said. They also have the potential of escalating conflict. Taking the time to become familiar with your non-verbal behaviors can benefit you in many settings. Conversations with friends, professors, supervisors, and colleagues can improve.

Sources:

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