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The Secret Language of Business

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Cool title.
Best part is that it's a pretty perfect description of nonverbal communication.

You might notice that I use the phrases “nonverbal communication” and “body language” almost interchangeably in this book at times. So let's define each of these right away.

The fact is that body language is a subdomain of nonverbal communication.

Body language refers to body position, gestures, eye contact, and . . . the body!

Nonverbal communication includes those things but also includes how people dress, societal norms on dress and behavior, the jewelry people wear, the tattoos people reveal, the distance people stand from each other, the way people use time, the way people use space . . . even the tone and pitch of people's voices.

And it is at this level of nonverbal communication that The Secret Language of Business occurs.

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The vast majority of all that is communicated is nonverbal. Everything in nonverbal communication has a significant impact on you and me. Most people, however, live very randomly or live intentionally and then send messages they believe to say one thing but are received as something else.

And that is why so few people are influential. Almost no one communicates clearly. Misunderstandings abound.

Why?

People were never taught how to use the environment, their desks, the color of their homes, their jewelry, their necklines, skirt length, low rider pants, tattoos, and so forth to influence.

And when you think about it that is a shame because the words you and I say are darned important, but the nonverbal communication we send and receive is far more important.

Here you go: A woman in an office is hoping for attention—and a promotion—from superiors for the good job she's doing, so she starts with the sweater with a plunging neckline and so forth.

Attention?

She gets it.

Promotion?

Not a chance.

An accumulation of studies shows that women who are in the field of selling (not including casinos and resorts) have longer appointments with the decision maker if they dress revealingly.

The other result?

They make far fewer sales.

Dress is very influential.

The term body language is overused.

One person might say, "Her body language was very negative throughout the meeting," while another person might say, "His body language was very aggressive and intimidating." In both cases, however, body language is only a portion of the communication process

that led to a specific conclusion or interpretation about the other person.

And interpretations are just as often incorrect as they are correct.

We speak of body language as if it were a separate, distinct activity, unrelated to other communication characteristics such as words, tone of voice, pacing, volume, and the like. The reality is all of these communication elements work together, and it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to completely separate them from each other.

Despite the complex interrelationships involved in communication, researchers and scientists have successfully studied its parts and components to produce a much greater understanding of how these parts work individually and how they work together. Body language and other elements of nonverbal communication are components of communication that are readily observable and measurable, so our knowledge about them continues to grow at a steady and rapid pace.

This book sheds light on body language and nonverbal communication. *The Secret Language of Business*. And there is a great deal of information I am excited to present along the way.

You can use all the factors you learn about to be more influential. You can use everything you learn here to read other people.

Because people's body movements are typically controlled by the nonconscious mind, the person you are watching may not only not be aware of the message he is sending, he may not even cognitively agree with it!

(You probably want to read that again.)

One of the reasons there is so much trouble in communication in general is because people live on autopilot. We rarely use our conscious will. If we had to use conscious thought for everything we do, we'd never get anything done, and we'd all die in car accidents in the next week.

At the nonconscious level (the part of us that for better and worse "does" but doesn't "think") the brain sends impulses for the body to move, be still, look, engage, confront, run, hide, you name it.

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And all of this happens before the thinking (cortical) part of the brain has clicked in and knows what the body is doing.

Words come out of your mouth and before you know it, you've said something you didn't mean (though you might have felt what you said).

Sometimes the thinking brain is in alignment with the nonconscious mind, and sometimes the two cause very different behaviors to happen.

In fact, a growing body of research reveals that *there is no significant correlation between the personality and behaviors of the nonconscious mind and the personality and behaviors of the conscious mind.*

(Say "wow.")

Thus, when you read someone, you might see one thing while the person is thinking of something totally different.

Finally, if you use this book to help you read the nonconscious mind and use the information as a way to predict nonconscious behavior and nonconscious decisions (those that happen quickly and without cognition) you will do much better at reading people and predicting their behavior.

You'll be able to influence people with ease.

You'll be able to know what they will do next more often than you might guess.

But will you know what they are thinking at the level of conscious thought?

That's not the best use of accurate body language reading.

One quick example.

Have you ever found yourself staring at someone, then after a minute you catch yourself and wonder why you are staring?

The person isn't attractive, and you aren't remotely interested.

But there you are burning a hole through this stranger.

In business you can get in big trouble for such behavior.

But try telling the woman that your nonconscious mind was at work and you didn't mean anything by it.

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And of course, in this case, that is the truth!

Your nonconscious mind might have been staring because it perceived her as a threat, or because the woman looked like someone else who had some connection to you (typically emotional and not good) in the past.

Whatever the case (you can't be certain as to why the nonconscious mind directs the body to do something, you can only observe the result), you learned something and so did she, and they were not necessarily the same things.

More often than not *The Secret Language of Business* is about influencing the nonconscious mind and the behavior it directs.

That said, it's mighty important to influence the thinking brain, too.

As you read this book, always be aware of these two crucial distinctions.

People's thoughts and behaviors aren't related anywhere near as often as you'd like to believe.

As a rule, the conscious mind is more influenced by words and the nonconscious mind is more influenced by everything else (nonverbal communication, including body language).

To learn more about the nonconscious mind and the illusion of conscious will, there is a lengthy discussion at www.kevinhogan.com/nonconsciousmind.htm.

The Study of Nonverbal Communication

The observation and discussion of body language has been around in one form or another since the days of ancient Rome and Greece. Body language and nonverbal behavior is referenced in many varied disciplines, such as anthropology, dance, psychiatry, and sociology. Even Charles Darwin tackled the subject of facial expressions

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in 1872; many of his theories have since been proven by modern researchers.

Body language as a formal area of study first emerged in the post-World War II years. The 1950s saw the first few in-depth examinations of nonverbal communication and the 1960s saw an exponential growth in the number and type of formal studies. The discipline continued to grow and change in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, with more growth and discovery happening in the current decade as well.

In the earliest years, researchers focused on body language as specific, separate actions with a single meaning. This gave way over the years to an understanding of body language as a complex aspect of communication where specific actions often have many different meanings depending on context, environment, culture, individual personalities, and so forth.

Why should you care about the formal study of body language?

Because the information revealed through scientific activities is enormously important to every aspect of your everyday life. There is no escaping the power and influence of body language; research and study simply identify and define it in ways that you can apply in the real world.

The problem until now has been a lack of resources to help you understand the scientific side of body language and translate it into practical applications for your life. This book is designed to fill that gap so you can look at nonverbal communication in an entirely new—and practical—way and then learn how to use that knowledge in an influential manner.

Before we get there, though, there are some basics to cover.

Nonverbal versus Verbal Communication

The definitions of nonverbal and verbal communication are of course argued from time to time as researchers gather more information and

try to form the most precise descriptions possible. For the purposes of this book, though, I'll stick with the most basic, generally accepted definitions.

Nonverbal communication: The process of sending and receiving messages without using words. Examples include body language, facial expression, gesture, movement, touch, distance, eye contact, and so on.

Verbal communication: The process of sending and receiving messages using words. Examples include spoken words, written words, and sign language.

Wait a minute. Verbal communication includes the words you write down on a piece of paper? You probably learned somewhere along the line that verbal communication is only the *spoken* word, but the strict interpretation of verbal communication focuses on words in general—spoken, written, and signed.

Experts sometimes disagree about how to classify communication such as sign language and tone of voice. Sign language uses gestures, which is nonverbal, but those gestures are actually words, which is verbal. Tone of voice is a spoken sound, which is verbal, but it is not a word so it is nonverbal.

It's easy to see how and why there are so many different interpretations, definitions, and nuances when it comes to discussing nonverbal and verbal communication. I'll leave it to the academic and scientific experts to figure out the finer points and move on to the more practical aspects of body language. My goal is to help you understand *The Secret Language of Business*.

Does one of these sentences include nonverbal communication?

1. It doesn't make any difference whether we categorize written material as verbal or nonverbal communication.

2. It DOESN'T make ANY DIFFERENCE whether we categorize written material as verbal or nonverbal communication!

Answer?

I don't know . . .

How Body Language Influences Communication

In an earlier section, I stated that nonverbal and verbal elements of communication couldn't be completely separated and isolated from the overall communication process. This is one of the most interesting (and at times frustrating) aspects of studying communication, because the potential variations and interactions are so numerous and so diverse that it can be hard to categorize them in a meaningful, definite way.

When you think solely about body language and how it influences communication, though, some basic features and functions emerge. These fall into the following general categories as identified by Mark Knapp in his book *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*:

- Repeating
- Conflicting
- Complementing
- Substituting
- Accenting/Moderating
- Regulating

Those are forbidding-sounding categories that come straight from the scientific and academic world. Let's give them some better real-world meaning with a few examples.

Repeating: Nonverbal behavior often serves to repeat what is said verbally. When you ask your spouse to put down the bag of

groceries on the table, do you point to the table during or after you speak? If so, that's repeating. The act of pointing (nonverbal) repeats the request (verbal) of where to put the groceries.

Conflicting: This is one of the biggest and most varied categories of nonverbal behavior. When you tell your friend the cake she baked is delicious (verbal) but your eyes dart away (nonverbal), that's conflicting. Conflicting body language is a bright, flashing indicator when you lie, feel nervous, disagree, or otherwise feel trapped or ambivalent about something. When verbal and nonverbal elements are in conflict, the person receiving the communication will usually give more credibility to the nonverbal behavior.

Even more fascinating, though, is that we interpret conflicting information based in part on how easy or hard it is to fake the particular nonverbal behavior. For instance, a child might say she has a stomachache and is unable to take out the garbage. The body language of a stomachache is hard to fake—pale color, clammy skin, and perhaps a fever or general discomfort for an extended period of time. Most parents will be skeptical from the start, only starting to believe her when it becomes clear her nonverbal behaviors are real.

Complementing: This category is somewhat intertwined with the Conflicting category. Nonverbal behavior that complements and supports verbal statements lends credibility to those statements if the nonverbal behavior is perceived to be genuine and not faked. For instance, I knew a woman who was pulled over by a state patrol officer for speeding. She was genuinely embarrassed at being pulled over because she had simply not paid attention to her speed. To make things worse, in nearly 20 years of driving, she had never been pulled over before. By the time the officer got to her car she was crying and very upset with herself.

Now, police officers are especially good at reading verbal and nonverbal communication under stress, because let's face it, the people they encounter don't want to get a ticket or go to jail so they will often try to lie and talk their way out of the situation. The state patrol officer who pulled over my friend could see right away that her nonverbal behavior (crying, shaking, and so on) was real and not faked. This, coupled with her immaculate driving record and admission of wrongdoing, convinced him to let her go with a warning. Her nonverbal behavior complemented her verbal statements, thus making them more credible to the officer.

Substituting: This category is for the body language used when a person does not want to use verbal communication. Perhaps the words are too hard to say out loud or saying them would create a conflict or confrontation. In this kind of situation, substituting nonverbal behavior for the words can get the message across in a way that is more comfortable.

Have you ever encountered an acquaintance in the grocery store who starts talking and then keeps talking? When that happens, chances are you first try to disengage yourself from the conversation using body language. You might start glancing away from the other person, or perhaps turn your body and/or take a step or two away. If the other person does not get the message you might have to resort to saying "I have to go now" or something similar, but you'd rather not have to do that. You would rather substitute nonverbal communication to end the conversation.

Accenting/Moderating: This category captures the kinds of nonverbal communication designed to enhance a verbal message. It might serve to amplify a particular point and give it more emphasis, or it might serve to moderate or soften a particular point. Either way, this type of body language adds depth and nuance to a message.

For instance, if you are angry with a coworker you might accent the message with a pointing gesture, a frown, and a shake of your head. This lets the other person know you are quite serious about your anger and want them to get the message very clearly. If you are correcting a minor mistake made by an employee, however, you might moderate the message with a palm up gesture, a reassuring smile, or a pat on the shoulder for encouragement. This lets the other person know you are serious about wanting the mistake corrected, but also softens the message a bit so he or she understands it's not the end of the world, just a mistake and a learning experience.

Regulating: This category contains nonverbal behaviors that regulate or pace the communication of a message. It might be used to indicate when you are ready to move from one topic to another topic, or to transition smoothly to another person's chance to speak. Regulating behaviors help to moderate and control the communication between and among multiple people.

For instance, if you are leading the roundtable segment of a team meeting, you might nod, turn, and gesture to the next person at the table when it is his or her turn to speak. Some people are not very good at regulating behaviors; they interrupt before another person is finished speaking, or they talk constantly without allowing input from others.

Practical Applications of Body Language

So what does this all really mean? What are the practical applications of body language and nonverbal communication? The practical applications are nearly limitless, and quite often they are used unconsciously rather than deliberately. Some people are just naturals when it comes to the effective use of body language in everyday life, while others struggle with how to learn it and use it well.

Common examples of when and where nonverbal communication applies to the real world include:

- Office
- Selling
- Negotiations
- Job interviews
- Persuasive discussions
- Client/vendor interactions
- Walking through the grocery store
- Meetings
- Politics
- Hiring
- Intimacy
- Friendship
- Parenting
- Working with animals
- Business meetings
- Real estate showings
- Meal time
- Running errands
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Shopping
- Group leadership
- Sports activities
- Vacation planning

This list could go on and on and on! The reality is that nonverbal communication is part of everything you do every day.

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Your personal nonverbal communication influences everyone around you . . . and theirs influences you.

There is no way to avoid it—and why would you want to? Body language is one of the most powerful components of the communication process, and you have the choice of how you use it. You can leave it to your unconscious or actively learn to apply it.

Choose the more active path of learning because that holds the greatest potential for making all aspects of your life richer, more interesting, more productive, and more effective. Helping you to do that is why I wrote this book.

Chapter 1 TAKEAWAYS

1. The observation and discussion of body language has been around for centuries but only became a serious scientific discipline after the end of World War II.
2. Body language is an important component of the overall communication process, but cannot be entirely separated and isolated from other components. They all integrate and interact with each other in many different ways, depending on context, environment, culture, personalities, and so forth.
3. There are many detailed, nuanced definitions that may be applied to nonverbal communication and verbal communication, but for the purposes of this book we'll focus on the most basic definitions:

Nonverbal communication. The process of sending and receiving messages without using words. Examples include body language, facial expression, gesture, movement, touch, distance, eye contact, and the like.

Verbal communication. The process of sending and receiving messages using words. Examples include spoken words, written words, and sign language.

4. There are six main categories of body language, as discussed in *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction* by Mark Knapp:
 - Repeating
 - Conflicting
 - Complementing
 - Substituting
 - Accenting/Moderating
 - Regulating
5. Body language has nearly endless practical applications in everyday life, whether it is applied unconsciously or with conscious deliberation. The best and most effective communicators take an active interest in learning how to make the best use of nonverbal communication.

Read more about the nonconscious mind and how it is often confused with the unconscious or subconscious mind at www.kevinhogan.com/nonconsciousmind.htm.

Chapter 1 WORKSHEET

1. Review the Chapter 1 Takeaways and answer the following:
 - Which key point(s) did you find most interesting? Why?
 - Which key point(s) did you find most surprising? Why?
2. Think about a recent example of communication you had with another person. Write down a description of the nonverbal behaviors that occurred during the interaction.

Now categorize each nonverbal behavior (repeating, conflicting, complementing, substituting, accenting/moderating, or regulating).

3. Go to a restaurant, coffee shop, shopping mall, or other public location and observe an interaction between two or more people. Write down a description of the nonverbal behaviors you observe.

Now categorize each nonverbal behavior (repeating, conflicting, complementing, substituting, accenting/moderating, or regulating).