

# **Body Language in Europe**

## **Unlocking the Secrets**

**Horst Hanisch**

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© Third English edition: 2016 by Horst Hanisch, Bonn, Germany  
© Second English edition: 2014 by Horst Hanisch, Bonn, Germany  
© First English edition: 2008 by Horst Hanisch, Bonn, Germany  
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**Idea and text:** Horst Hanisch, Bonn

**English editing and translation:** Thomas Schommers, Neuss

**Book typesetting:** Guido Lokietek, Aachen; Horst Hanisch, Bonn

**Cover:** engine-productions Medienproduktion Christian Spatz, Cologne; Horst Hanisch, Bonn

**Pictures:** engine-productions Medienproduktion Christian Spatz, Cologne; Horst Hanisch, Bonn

**Publisher:** BOD – Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt

**ISBN:** 978-3-7494-3164-9

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Body Language Auszug aus  
von Horst Hanisch

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# Auszug aus Body Language in Europe von Horst Hanisch

### Greeting (second edition)



*Jürgen Weischer*  
*President EUFH/CBS/EMS University Group*

### **"Your mouth can lie, your body cannot."**

Everybody knows the saying out of our grandma's era "First impressions are everything!" Today, we hear more often its modification "You don't get a second chance for the first impression" or even more definite "Your mouth can lie, your body cannot." Before you introduce yourself or say your first sentence other people have already formed their first impression and this impression counts. It determines whether it is easy or difficult to communicate with the other person.

There are more decisions made the moment you see somebody for the first time than most people can imagine. To fold one's arms, to stoop, or to have cagey eyes are signs for weakness and uncertainty. They do not support the words spoken with reliability and dependability.

Body language is not only important in conferences and business negotiations. In private life, it can demonstrate everything from trust and sympathy, to neutrality and suspicion all the way to profound aversion towards somebody.

In this book, Horst Hanisch gives precise examples as good guidelines for a self-confident appearance, for a positive non-verbal communication and he encourages gaining confidence.

The goal of this book is to give the reader a future advantage by gaining more self-confidence and to present more ideas on how to analyze or unlock the body language of other people.

This competitive advantage should be used. In order to fulfill this goal this book can be very useful.

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(Horst Hanisch has worked for different universities as a rhetoric coach for quite a few years. Through his research and experience he gave thousands of our students' necessary skills and success factors.)

Jürgen Weischer, 2008

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### Foreword

Dear reader,

American research done by Albert Mehrabian indicates that 93 % of all interpersonal dialog is done through non-speaking behavior – nonverbal communication. The way we watch and observe, how we move and how we use our body to make a point will be followed and analyzed by others generally unconsciously. Body language and spoken words complement each other and give an honest overall view to other people and to ourselves.

Sometimes we just have a feeling that the person we are talking with is not being honest but we not know how to verify it. "I do not have a good feeling!" It could be that the body is telling us something else than what we hear. Is he telling a fib or is he just insecure or perhaps nervous?

It does not matter if you are skeptical about the possibility of reading body language. It is possible. Our goal for this book is to unlock the secrets of body language and to recognize and understand the mosaic tiles of body language and to analyze them.

Everybody who becomes intensively engaged with the subject will quickly observe just how much human body language tells us. We do not need to use this knowledge to manipulate others but we can use this knowledge have an easier conversation with everybody.

It took years to gather all required information together in order to write this book.

Out of the innumerable gestures observed, we have chosen the most important ones for the Western culture.

All pictures and text should demonstrate what body language tells us and how it usually can be interpreted.

One piece of advice up-front: I believe that it does not make sense to go through everyday life always trying to control our body language because we are afraid of other people trying to analyze our body language and manipulate us. NO – if our "verbal" statements are honest then our "nonverbal" statements are honest as well. The new knowledge about body language can contribute to awareness about our body language. Therefore we can train ourselves to avoid certain behaviors that generate negative interpretations; especially in important situations like a job interview.

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Therefore I close this foreword with these words: I hope, dear reader, that you will not only be able to supplement your knowledge of body language, but will also enjoy reading this book. Here's to harnessing the power of body language to make the most of your personal and professional future! Have fun reading and studying this book!

Horst Hanisch

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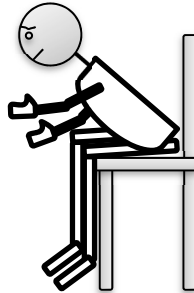
# Unlocking the secrets of body language: The body

## 3.1 Upper part of the body, shoulder, chest, stomach

### 3.1.1 Deeply bending the upper part of the body

The distance between two people decreases significantly by using this posture. The difference from the posture in 3.1.2 is that this posture invades into the personal space of the other person and he might get uncomfortable (i.e., negative posture).

This posture demonstrates arrogance or presumptuousness and creates negative or aggressive feelings.



The upper part of the body is deeply bent over towards the other person (invading his personal space).

### 3.1.2 Bending over the upper part of the body

The distance between two people decreases by using this posture. Both people want to be closer in order to better connect to each other.

This posture is positive for the person because it indicates that the other person is interested in what he is talking about. It is expected to have a valuable co-operation for both sides.

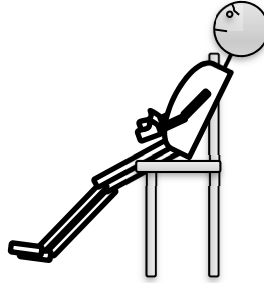


The upper part of the body is bent over towards the other person.

### **3.1.3 Leaning back the upper part of the body**

The distance between two people increases by using this posture. That means that there is no sign of agreement and the individuals do not want to get close to each other.

This is critical because there is obvious disfavor about the subject or the latest statement.



The upper part of the body is leaned back and far away from the other person.

### **3.1.4 Bowing one's body to the front**

This posture demonstrates that the person is attentively listening.

If the head is tucked down as well, it is a posture of humility.



Standing up or sitting down, the upper part of the body is bowed towards the other person.

### **3.1.5 Hunching shoulders**

The person makes himself smaller and protects himself by hunching his shoulders tightly together. Generally, this posture is seen together with the head turning down.

This posture is usually evaluated as being negative because it symbolizes constraint and shyness.



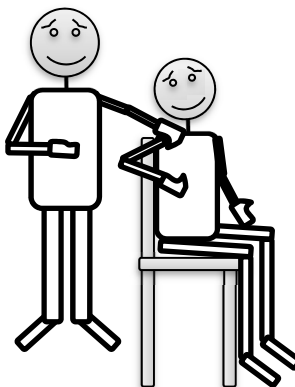
The shoulders are hunched tightly together leaning to the front.

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### **3.1.6 Give someone a pat on the back**

This gesture may be seen as an invasion of one's personal space but it is meant as a gesture of friendship and it symbolizes closeness and empathy.

It also can be used to encourage somebody. This gesture is usually used in a positive atmosphere but the person using it should make sure that the other person is comfortable with this gesture.

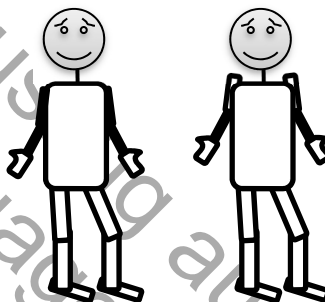


To give the other person a pat on the back.

### **3.1.7 Shrugging shoulders**

A statement that is easy to understand: "I don't know." or "I can't imagine what was just said."

It is possible that this kind of statement comes together with a certain level of disinterest towards the subject.

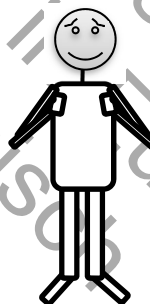


Shrugging the shoulders once or several times.

### **3.1.8 Linking one's arms underneath the armpits**

A person who behaves like that is satisfied with himself and his environment and is open towards everything.

This gesture can be seen as arrogant or presumptuous by others.



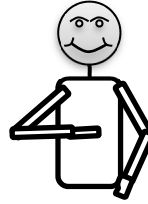
The thumbs are linked underneath the armpits and the other fingers are fan-shaped and widespread.

### **3.1.9 Cutting a hand at the level of the stomach**

"I have had it up to here!"

The person is "fed up" or "has had it!"

With this gesture he wants to demonstrate that he wants to be cut off from the subject.



The flat hand makes a cutting gesture in front of his stomach from the left to the right side. The palm of the hand is down.

### **3.1.10 Tapping on the stomach**

The attention is directed to the well-fed stomach. It is a sign the person is feeling fine and is well-fed.

Together with this posture, often the upper part of the body leans back.



Tapping lightly on the stomach with one or both hands.

### **3.1.11 Holding one's hand on the stomach**

"I'm happy and satisfied. I have had enough to eat."

Sometimes it is a sign that the person ate too much and feels overly full.

This posture is seen often after lunch break. The physical energy went from the head to the stomach to digest the food. Therefore "brain-work" is barely possible.



One or two hands are lying on the stomach.

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### 3.1.12 Tapping the chest (1)

The index finger points on the chest and the person asks the other person: "Are you talking to me?" Very often it goes together with knitting one's brow (see 2.6.8: *Knit one's brow*). This posture is often seen if somebody is accused of something bad that happened for no good reason. Generally the person is in a good mood and it is easy to clear up the situation.



Tapping with the index finger on the chest. The index finger stays there for a few seconds.

### 3.1.13 Tapping the chest (2)

The person wants to call attention to himself. "Hello, I'm still here. This means me."

Sometimes it is also used educational to support the verbal statement: "I've always told you ..."



The index finger taps several times on the chest.

### 3.1.14 Pressing on the chest

This is a slightly aggressive posture. "I have to hold myself back! Otherwise I'll explode!" The person is angry or furious at a person he wants to attack but the person is usually not present. By holding the fists close to his own body the person tries to hold himself back.

This kind of posture is supported to correlative facial expressions.



One or two fist are clenched together and pressed against the chest.

### 3.1.15 Holding the chest

This posture demonstrates a complete surprise. The person feels verbally attacked and asserts his innocence surprise. "I am not aware of being accused of anything."

Usually the eyebrows are lifted up in surprise.

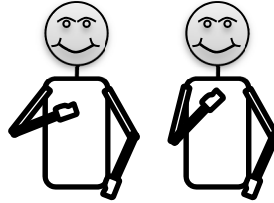


One or both hands are lying on the chest and they press a little bit on the chest.

### 3.1.16 Knocking on the chest

The person wants to get the attention of the other people. "Hello, I'm still here. This means me."

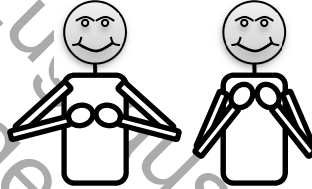
This gesture is mostly used to support verbal expressions.



The closed fingertips of one or both hands are knocking a few times on the chest.

### 3.1.17 Beating on the chest

This is a body movement that is normally seen with men. It demonstrates how strong and powerful the person is. It is possible to compare this gesture with the fauna (e.g., specific species of monkeys). Very often this gesture is used to be funny or as a joke.



One or both fists are beating several times on the chest.

### 3.1.18 Crossing one's arms in front of the chest

With this posture the person protests his innocence. "I wash my hands of it. I swear!"

This posture is in Islamic cultures also seen as greeting.



The hands and arms lay crossed on the chest.



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### **3.1.19 Laying both arms in front of the stomach**

This is a weaker form of the posture "Folding one's arms in front of the upper part of the body" (see 4.1.1: *Folding one's arms in front of the upper part of the body*). This posture demonstrates that the person is insecure and constrained and that he holds on tightly to himself. He wants to protect his body from possible attack.



Both arms are parallel to each other and held in front of his stomach.

### **3.1.20 Laying the left hand on the chest**

This is a protest of innocence. "I swear!" or "On my honor ..."

The person demonstrates that he has nothing to hide.



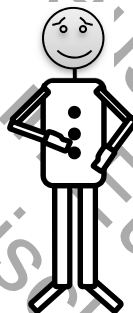
One hand lies on the chest. Usually it is the left hand.

### **3.1.21 Opening one's jacket during a conversation**

There are two possibilities for an interpretation of this gesture:

1. "It is too warm for me. I don't feel that good in my skin. I'd like to shed my skin."

2. It could be a certain form of arrogance. The person demonstrates to the other person that he is superior to him and that he can decide by himself to open his jacket informally in a formal conversation.



The buttons of the jacket will be opened during a formal conversation.

### **3.1.22 Arms folded behind the back**

To hide the arms from other people demonstrates nervousness and constraint. The person tries to hold on to himself, so to speak. If the hands and arms are hidden behind the back, the other person cannot interpret anything from the posture of the arms and hands because he cannot see them.

For self-conscious people this is a good possibility to step up or to speak relaxed in front of a group.



One hand is holding the other arm behind the back.

### **3.1.23 Laying an arm behind the back**

If one arm is behind the back the person is slightly embarrassed about something.

The other person cannot see what the hand is doing behind the back.



One arm is laying behind the back at the height of the kidneys.