

Horst Hanisch



BODY LANGUAGE

in Europe

REVISED,
FIFTH
EDITION



Body Language in Europe

Unlocking the Secrets

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, 2008

“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 nonverbal 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.

(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.)

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Jürgen Weischer, 2008

“Language is the source of misunderstandings.”

Antoine Marie Jean-Baptist Roger de Saint-Exupéry, French author
(1900 - 1944)

Foreword

*"To think simply is a gift from God.
To think simply and speak simply is a double gift from God."
Konrad Hermann Joseph Adenauer, German chancellor
(1876 - 1967)*

Stay authentic

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.

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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Chapter 1

Auszug aus
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Basic Assumptions

Verbal language and nonverbal language

*"Some German words are so long that they have a perspective.
These things are not words, they are alphabetical processions."*

**Mark Twain, US-am. author
(1835 - 1910)**

Communication – understanding between two persons

Every day we talk to other people around us. We have a conversation or just simply have a small talk. As a seminar coach, for example, we talk to you and with you a lot of the time during a seminar.

The participants listen very carefully at first, but as we continue to talk, their eye lids get heavier. It happens very seldom – but it has happened before – a participant slowly falls asleep.

If we could separate verbal and nonverbal language, more of our participants would have had problems following the coach over a longer period of time. Just imagine if you had to concentrate for six to eight hours to one person lecturing.

Impossible, right? Well, fortunately your spoken words (i.e., verbal) are connected with the unspoken (i.e., nonverbal). Speaking without speaking?

To summarize: Communication – understanding between two persons – can be done verbally (with words), paraverbal (e.g., whistling) or nonverbal (as we describe it here: body language).

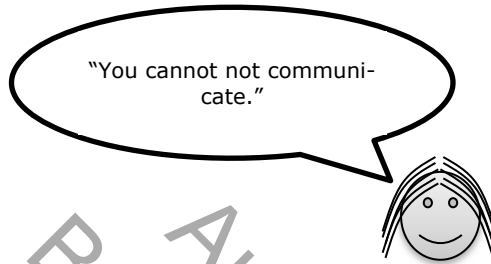
Perhaps it is common to believe that the largest part of communication between two people is done through verbal communication.

In fact, it can quickly be shown that we actually can communicate much more information without words. Therefore, we conclude that we actually can speak without speaking.

Chapter 1 – Basic Assumptions

Whenever two people get together, whether they know each other or not, they immediately begin to communicate with each other.

“You cannot not communicate” (Paul Watzlawick, 1921 – 2007).

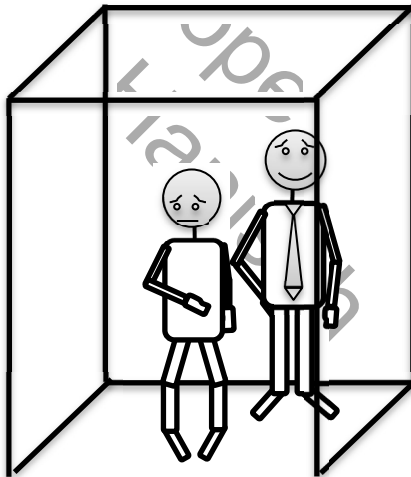


Just imagine the following situations:

A stranger in an elevator

We get in an elevator with a stranger.

We know that it is an uncomfortable situation; we begin to have an unpleasant feeling. We do not talk to each other; we stare at the floor display or the ceiling of the elevator.



We cannot escape – we are stuck in the elevator. We are standing close to each other but we are not capable of starting verbal communication with the other person.

By staring at the ceiling, we avoid eye contact and we send the signal that we are not interested in talking. Maybe we intensively watch the toes of our shoes.

That shows even more that we are in an uncomfortable situation. To look down implies certain humility and to look up indicates that we are looking for help nobody can give us in this situation.

An older lady and a punk

An older lady walks through a shopping area. A young punk comes from the opposite side and walks in the direction of the older lady.

Automatically she presses her purse tighter to her body and has a firmer grip on her cane to get a more secure pace. Yes, maybe even in order to use her walking stick as a potential weapon to defend herself.

If she would have the possibility she would even change directions to avoid a direct confrontation with the young punk.

In the subway

A guy is sitting on a bench for two people in the subway. The bench across from him is empty. A second guy enters the subway and takes a seat on the empty bench.

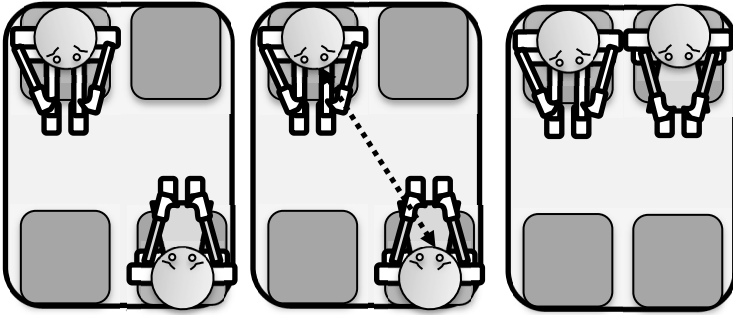
After quick eye contact (he's not going to do anything to me?) the first guy starts looking out the window. There is no desire for any more eye contact.

How would the person have reacted if the second guy would have requested the empty seat on the bench right next to the first guy?

Same situation in the subway. The first guy has his computer bag next to him and on the bench across from him he has a newspaper laid out and he is reading it.

Chapter 1 – Basic Assumptions

Would you request one of the seats if there were other seats available in the subway?



Without speaking directly to the other persons, our examples show through nonverbal communication what the individuals want, what they do not want or what they are afraid of. Everybody knows several situations like that.

Nonverbal communication allows us to act freely and secure in society. Without speaking, other people understand what we want, wish, feel, or what we are afraid of.

These examples demonstrate how broad nonverbal communication is and how important this kind of communication is for inter-personal relationships.

Seven seconds and four minutes

Did you know that after a maximum of seven seconds (7!) you have made the decision whether you like somebody or not? These are seven seconds where you most likely have not spoken a word.

When you need information at the train station platform: Who do you ask? The first person that you see?

Did you know that a recruiter knows after four minutes (4!) in a job interview whether you get a job offer or not?

When you meet somebody for the first time most of your communication will be nonverbal. Imagine you meet somebody you have not seen before in a hotel lobby.

You walk up to him, smile and then reach out to shake his hand with your first words. Realize how fast the first few seconds are gone.

Before you begin to talk to your audience as a speaker, coach, or lecturer, most likely some seconds have already passed; sometimes a few minutes. At that point, the audience has already decided if they have a positive or negative feeling about you. All that without you even saying one single word!

Therefore it is very important to avoid any kind of body movements that could cause negative connotations; especially at the beginning of a speech.

During the conversation or presentation almost everybody who has certain skills can verbally persuade the audience.

Just as the audience can interpret the nonverbal body language of the speaker within seconds, the speaker also can do the same with the audience.

This way the person presenting is able to quickly develop a very important impression of the audience. Is their attitude more likely positive or negative? Are they aggressive and waiting for the first attack?

Answering these questions is essential for survival.

It would not have been the first time that a well-educated and trained coach or entertainer failed in front of the audience because he did not interpret the body language of his audience at all or he interpreted it incorrectly.

We do not want that to happen to you and therefore we will unlock and explain many nonverbal signals of body language.

Of course, nonverbal communication also happens between two people who simply talk to each other, who meet in an elevator, or who negotiate a sale.

Unlocking the secrets of body language: The body

"It's never too early to try, and it's never too late to talk."
John Fitzgerald Kennedy, US-am. president
(1917 - 1963)

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.

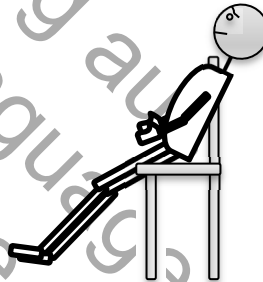
It is expected to have a valuable co-operation for both sides.

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.

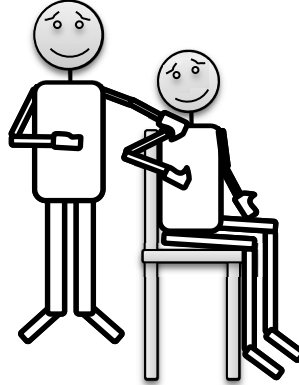


The shoulders are hunched tightly together leaning to the front.

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.



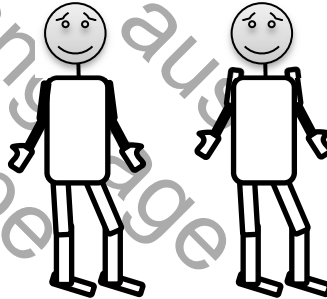
This gesture is usually used in a positive atmosphere but the person using it should make sure that the other person is comfortable with this gesture.

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."



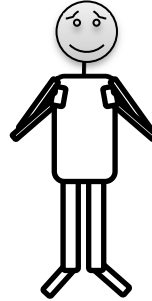
It is possible that this kind of statement comes together with a certain level of disinterest towards the subject.

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



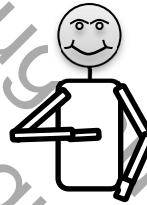
The thumbs are linked underneath the armpits and the other fingers are fan-shaped and widespread.

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.

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 by correlative facial expressions.

One or two fists 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."



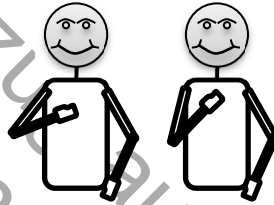
Usually the eyebrows are lifted up in surprise.

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."

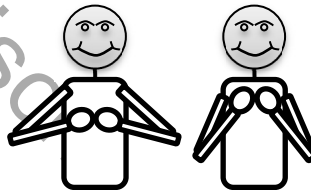


This gesture is mostly used to support verbal expressions.

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.

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.

Horst Hanisch

BODY LANGUAGE IN EUROPE Unlocking the secrets

Here is all you need to know about unlocking the secrets of body language. Knowledge gained from this book will help you to recognize positive signs from others, but more importantly, you can identify negative signals so that you can determine how to better react to them.

It should help you in business relationships to “read” other people and, hopefully, gain an advantage.

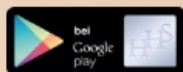
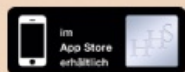
It will also help you recognize in yourself how your body language may be read by others. You can learn to adapt your style and stance to reflect a different attitude if it would help a situation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Horst Hanisch has worked as author, trainer, and coach for more than 35 years. He lectures in fields including communication, personality development, soft skills, and etiquette. He has published more than 120 books.

Horst Hanisch holds in-house company training courses, and open seminars on topics such as ‘Business Etiquette’, ‘Table Manners’, ‘Self-Confident Presenting’ and ‘Presentation and Rhetoric’.

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