Chapter 1

Defining Body Language

In This Chapter

- Finding out how body language speaks for you
- Gesturing for a purpose
- Understanding what you're communicating

The science of body language is a fairly recent study, dating primarily from around 60 years ago, although body language itself is, of course, as old as humans. Psychologists, zoologists, and social anthropologists have conducted detailed research into the components of body language – part of the larger family known as non-verbal behaviour.

If you're quiet for a moment and take the time to pay attention to body language movements and expressions that silently communicate messages of their own, you can cue in on gestures that convey a feeling and transmit a thought. If you pay close attention, you can identify gestures that you automatically associate with another person, which tell you who she is. In addition, you may notice other types of gestures that reveal a person's inner state at that moment.

In this chapter you discover how to interpret non-verbal language, exploring the gestures and actions that reveal thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. Also, you have a quick glance at some of the research into this unspoken language and recognise similarities and differences throughout the world. In addition, you find out how you can use gestures to enhance your relationships and improve your communication.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Discovering How Body Language Conveys Messages

When cave-dwellers discovered how to decipher grunts and to create words to convey their message, their lives became a lot more complex. Before verbal communication, they relied on their bodies to communicate. Their simple brains informed their faces, torsos, and limbs. They instinctively knew that fear, surprise, love, hunger, and annoyance were different attitudes requiring different gestures. Emotions were less complex then, and so were the gestures.

Speech is a relatively new introduction to the communication process and is mainly used to convey information, including facts and data. Body language, on the other hand, has been around forever. Without relying on the spoken word for confirmation, the body's movements convey feelings, attitudes, and emotions. Like it or not, your body language, or non-verbal behaviour, says more about you, your attitudes, moods, and emotions, than you may want to reveal.

According to research conducted by Professor Albert Mehrabian of the University of California, Los Angeles, 55 per cent of the emotional message in face-to-face communication results from body language. You only have to experience any of the following gestures or expressions to know how true the expression is, 'Actions speak louder than words':

- Someone pointing her finger at you
- A warm embrace
- A finger wagging in your face
- A child's pout
- A lover's frown
- A parent's look of worry
- An exuberant smile
- Your hand placed over your heart

Projecting an image in the first 30 seconds

You can tell within the first seven seconds of meeting someone how she feels about herself by the expression on her face and the way she moves her body. Whether she knows it or not, she's transmitting messages through her gestures and actions.

You walk into a room of strangers and from their stance, movements, and expressions you receive messages about their feelings, moods, attitudes, and emotions. Look at the teenage girl standing in the corner. From her slouching shoulders, her lowered head, and the way her hands fidget over her stomach, you can tell that this little wallflower is lacking in self-confidence.

Another young woman in this room of strangers is standing in a group of contemporaries. She throws her head back as she laughs, her hands and arms move freely and openly, and her feet are planted firmly beneath her, hip width apart. This woman is projecting an image of self-confidence and joie de vivre that draws people to her.

How you position your head, shoulders, torso, arms, hands, legs, and feet, and how your eyes, mouth, fingers, and toes move, tell an observer more about your state of being, including your attitude, emotions, thoughts, and feelings, than any words you can say.

Transmitting messages unconsciously

Although you're capable of choosing gestures and actions to convey a particular message, your body also sends out signals without your conscious awareness. Dilated or contracted eye pupils and the unconscious movements of your hands and feet are examples of signals that reveal an inner emotion that the person signalling may prefer to conceal. For example, if you notice that the pupils of someone's eyes are dilated, and you know that she's not under the influence of drugs, you'd be correct in assuming that whatever she's looking at is giving

her pleasure. If the pupils are contracted the opposite is true. These individual signals can be easily overlooked or misidentified if they're taken out of their social context, or if they're not identified as part of a cluster of gestures involving other parts of the body.

At times in life you may want to conceal your thoughts and feelings, so you behave in a way that you believe hides what's going on inside. And yet wouldn't you know it, out pops a slight giveaway gesture, often invisible to the untrained eye, sending a signal that all's not what it appears. Just because these micro gestures and expressions are fleeting doesn't mean that they're not powerful.

In the 1970s, Paul Ekman and W V Friesen developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) to measure, describe, and interpret facial behaviours. This instrument is designed to measure even the slightest facial muscle contractions and determine what category or categories each facial action fits into. It can detect what the naked eye can't and is used by law enforcement agencies, film animators, and researches of human behaviour.

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Professor Albert Mehrabian's classic study of how messages are received and responded to during face-to-face communication shows that when an incongruity exists between the spoken word and how you deliver it, 7 per cent of the message is conveyed through your words, 38 per cent is revealed through your vocal quality, and a whopping 55 per cent of your message comes through your gestures, expression, and posture. Mehrabian's premise is that the way people communicate is inseparable from the feelings that they project, consciously or not, in daily social interactions. Although some people contest Mehrabian's figures, the point remains that body language and vocal quality significantly contribute to the meaning of the message and determine the effectiveness of our relationships.

Arthur is the chief executive of a global telecoms company. Highly accomplished and rewarded for his successes, he still harbours some self-doubt and insecurity. This uncertainty is particularly evident when he's making formal presentations. He holds a pad of paper in front of himself, as if it were a protective shield. When he's unsure of the word he wants

to use, he quickly and briefly rubs the skin under his nose with his index finger. When he moves from one point to the next in his presentation, he quickly taps his forehead with his left index finger as if to remind himself that he's about to move to the next point. Seeing himself on DVD he recognised how these meaningless gestures were revealing his lack of security, and how uncomfortable he feels in front of a large audience. By visualising himself presenting at his best and modelling specific behaviours of presenters who Arthur thinks are excellent, he developed ways of eliminating his unconscious negative gestures.

Substituting behaviour for the spoken word

Sometimes a gesture is more effective in conveying a message than any words you can use. Signals expressing love and support, pleasure and pain, fear, loathing, and disappointment are clear to decipher and require few, if any, words for clarification. Approval, complicity, or insults are commonly communicated without a sound passing between lips. By frowning, smiling, or turning your back on another person, your gestures need no words to clarify their meaning.

When words aren't enough or the word mustn't be spoken out loud, you gesture to convey your meaning. Some examples are

- Putting your index finger in front of your mouth while at the same time pursing your lips is a common signal for silence.
- Putting your hand up sharply with your fingers held tightly together and your palm facing forward means 'Stop!'.
- Winking at another person hints at a little secret between the two of you.

When Libby, the well loved and highly successful Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival was honoured for her years of service, she felt proud and humbled. Looking around the room filled with colleagues, friends, and major financial contributors, Libby placed her right hand over her heart as she thanked them all for their years of support,

belief, and dedication. Around the room, many people's eyes were moist and they held their fingers to their lips. Libby's hand to her heart reflected her appreciation.

Fingers placed over the mouth indicate that they're keeping something from coming out.

Gesturing to illustrate what you're saying

When you describe an object, you frequently use gestures to illustrate what the object is like. Your listener finds it easier to understand what you're saying when you let your body create a picture of the object rather than relying on words alone. If you're describing a round object, like a ball, for example, you may hold your hands in front of yourself with your fingers arched upward and your thumbs pointing down. Describing a square building you may draw vertical and horizontal lines with a flat hand, cutting through the space like a knife. If you're telling someone about a turbulent ride on a boat or plane, your arms and hands may beat up and down in rhythmic fashion. Describing a large object may entail holding your arms out wide. If you're illustrating a small point you may hold your fingers close together. The point is that gesturing is a useful means of conveying visual information.

Because some people take in information more effectively by seeing what's being described, illustrating your message through gestures helps create a clear picture for them. To help someone who can't see, to experience what you're describing, hold her hands in the appropriate position.

As Lotsie was describing her climb up Mount Kilimanjaro she acted out those moments when the air felt so thin that she was hardly able to breathe and when she struggled to put one foot in front of the other. She mimed leaning on her walking stick, bending over with the weight of her equipment, gasping for air, and pausing between shuffled steps as she put one foot in front of the other. Her gestures painted the combined picture of a woman who was both fit and exhausted.

Physically supporting the spoken word

Gesturing can add emphasis to your voice, clarify your meaning, and give impact to your message. Whether your point requires a gentle approach, or a firm telling off, your body's instinct is to reflect and move in harmony with the emotion.

In addition to reinforcing your message, hand signals especially reflect your desire for your message to be taken seriously. Watch a well-schooled politician standing at the podium. See how the hands move in a precise, controlled manner. No wasted gestures, just those specific ones that paint a clear picture and accurately convey the message.

Experienced lawyers, celebrities, and anyone in the public arena are also adept at emphasising their messages through considered movements and gestures. By carefully timing, focusing, and controlling their actions, moving in synchronicity with their spoken words, and responding appropriately to the atmosphere in their environment, they court and woo the people they want, and dismiss others with aplomb.

When you're giving bad news and want to soften the blow, adapt your body language to reflect empathy. Move close to the person you're comforting and tilt your body towards hers. You may even touch her on the hand or arm, or place your arm around her shoulder.

When you're making a formal presentation, use gestures to help your audience remember the points you're making.

During the introduction to your presentation, as you establish the points to be covered, list them separately on your fingers. You may hold them up in front of you, or touch your fingers individually on one hand with a finger from your other hand as you say the point. (Note: Most British and American people begin counting with their index finger. Many Europeans begin counting with their thumb.) When talking about point 1 in your presentation, point the first finger, or gesture to it; when you reach point two, point or gesture to your second finger, and so on.

Revealing thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs

You don't have to tell people how you're feeling for them to know. Look at Rodin's sculpture of *The Thinker.* There can be no doubt about that person's state of mind: thoughtful, serious, and contemplative. Equally so, a child throwing a tantrum with stomping feet, clenched fists, and a screwed up face is letting you know that she's not happy.

Think of your body as if it were a movie screen. The information to be projected is inside you and your body is the vehicle onto which the information is displayed. Whether you're anxious, excited, happy, or sad, your body shows the world what's going on inside. Here are some examples:

- People who feel threatened or unsure of themselves touch themselves as a means of self-comfort or self-restraint. Gestures, such as rubbing their foreheads, crossing their arms, and holding or rubbing their fingers in front of their mouths, provide comfort and protection (see Figure 1-1).
- People who perform specific gestures reserved for religious rituals reveal their beliefs and values. Upon entering a Catholic church, the congregation dip their fingers into holy water and cross themselves. Before entering the home of many Jewish people, you may touch the mezuzah by the front door. Muslims bow in prayer facing east. By performing these gestures, people are demonstrating their respect for the culture, its traditions, and values.
- People in a state of elation often breathe in deeply and gesture outwards with expanded arms. Pictures of winning sportspeople frequently show them in the open position with their arms extended, their heads thrown back, and their mouths and eyes opened in ecstasy.
- Footballers who miss the penalty kick and city traders who get their numbers wrong often walk dejectedly with their heads down, and their hands clasped behind their necks. The hand position is a comforting gesture and the head facing downwards shows that the individual's upset.

Figure 1-1: These two men are telling us they're disagreeing about something.

- People in despair, or feeling down and depressed, reveal their thoughts and attitudes by the slouch in their step, their drooping heads, and their downward cast eyes. Positive people, on the other hand, reveal their thoughts and attitudes with an upright stance, a bounce in their step, and eyes that appear lively and engaged.
- Not every bent head signals depression. Sometimes it just means that you're reflecting, thinking, or absorbing information. If you're demonstrating the behaviour of someone who's thinking hard, your head most likely rests in your hand or on your fingertips, like Rodin's *The Thinker*.

At Peter and Louise's wedding anniversary celebrations, Peter stood up to toast his wife and children. As he raised his glass to the family members, his feelings for them were clear. By the way he slightly leaned forward toward his son, Sebastian, you were able to sense the great warmth and tenderness he held for

him. As he turned to his daughter Olivia, to express his amazement at her joyous spirit, he slightly lifted his head and tossed it back. When he turned to gaze at his wife Louise, his eyes softened and a gentle smile played at the sides of his mouth. He stood upright, held his arm forward, and raised his glass high.

Holding your hands over or near your heart, as shown in Figure 1-2, is an expression of how much something means to you.

Figure 1-2: The hands over the heart, the tilted head, and the open smile indicate appreciation.

Key Types of Gestures

Humans are blessed with the ability to create a wide variety of gestures and expressions from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. Gestures can show intention, such as leaning forward

just before rising out of a chair; as well as showing no intention, such as crossing arms and legs. Some gestures belong to you, because you've become so identifiable by them. Some gestures are displacement gestures: you do them for no reason other than to displace some energy. Some gestures are specific to local customs, and some are universal gestures that everyone does.

Unintentional gestures

Unintentional gestures are behaviours that inhibit your ability to act. They're like the fright part in the 'fright or flight' syndrome.

The unintentional gestures imply that you have no intention of moving from where you are. They hold you back, won't let you go, and your body says that you're not budging. And no amount of outside influence to get you to move is going to succeed.

Examples of unintentional gestures are

- Folded arms
- Lips pressed together
- A hand or finger in front of the mouth
- Crossed legs

These actions all keep you in place. You can't walk when your legs are crossed. You can't speak with your hand in front of your mouth. Crossed arms say that you're holding back.

Standing or sitting with your legs crossed is no position to take if you want to get out of town quickly. The scissor stance is a prime example of a gesture that keeps you in your place. One leg is crossed over the other, rendering you immobile (see Figure 1-3). When someone adopts this position you know she's staying put.

Because the scissor stance contains no sign of impatience, the gesture can come across as submissive. The person has no forward movement in her body as in the body of a person about to take action. The person who acts is usually considered to be dominant. Therefore, the person who stays put is usually considered to be submissive.

Figure 1-3: The finger over the mouth and the scissored legs indicate she's holding back.

Signature gestures: Gestures that define who you are

A signature gesture is one that you become known by, a common gesture that you perform in a particular way. The person who twirls her curls around her finger, or the one who sucks her thumb, or the one who pats her eyebrows. These gestures give us clues into the person's personality.

Signature gestures set you apart from all others. Think Napoleon Bonaparte and his mighty stance (see Figure 1-4) – on the canvas, not the battlefield. Standing with his hand tucked into his waistcoat, he looks the picture of pride and authority. Who knows if he ever really stood in that position. The artist created the image and we believe the artist.

Figure 1-4: The Bonaparte pose conveys stature and authority.

One of Diana, Princess of Wales's most vividly remembered signature gesture's was the head lowered, eyes looking upward, now known as the Shy Di look (see Figure 1-5).

Sophie is a delightful woman in her early twenties. Pretty, vivacious, and polite, Sophie's signature gesture is thumb-sucking. I first noticed this gesture when she spent several days at our home. Curled up on the couch, Sophie slipped her right thumb into her mouth, lightly rubbing her nose with her index finger. Claire, a woman in her forties, also sucks her thumb. Her variation on this gesture is a small piece of soft fabric that she rubs in the palm of her cupped hand.

Toby, my personal assistant, is a quiet, thoughtful, focused man. I'm highly energetic with a mind that skips and leaps from one project to the next. Frequently, I ask Toby to do one task, only to interrupt his concentration by asking him to do something else, often unrelated. When Toby pats his eyebrows with the tips of his fingers I know that the time's come for me to back off and let him get on with what he has to do.

Figure 1-5: A downward tilted head and upcast eyes looks vulnerable and pleading.

Some examples of signature gestures can be seen in a person's

- Posture
- Smile
- Hand clap
- Pointing finger
- Clothes tugging

Some sportspeople perform specific actions as an anchor to get them grounded and focus their energy. Before serving, the tennis player Rafael Nadal, tugs at the back of his shorts. This gesture is so closely associated with this gifted sportsman that other players have been known to mock him on the courts and in the dressing rooms by performing it in front of him.

By recognising signature gestures you can tell what kind of person you're dealing with. Certain gestures, like clapping the hands together once, show a mind that's organised. The hair twirling gesture indicates that the person may be a day dreamer. When you successfully read the signs you can figure out how best to manage the person.

If you want to be easily identified and remembered you can create your own signature gesture. Victoria Beckham's sexily defiant pout has become her signature gesture, as has Hugh Grant's foppish head toss.

Fake gestures: Pulling the wool

Fake gestures are designed to camouflage, conceal, and fool. They deliberately point you in one direction to make you believe something that isn't so. Fake gestures pretend to be something when they're actually something else.

You're able to tell a fake gesture from a real one because some of the real gesture's parts are missing.

Some gestures that are commonly faked are

- Smiling
- Frowning
- Sighing
- Crying
- Holding your body as if in pain

Anna is a highly motivated recently qualified lawyer in a large London firm. She knows that, in part, her success depends on her ability to get on well with clients and colleagues. One day her supervising partner invited her to attend a client meeting and to put together the remaining briefs that a previous trainee had begun and hadn't had time to finish. Anna, already overloaded with work, stayed at the office until well past midnight. In spite of little sleep and over an hour's commute that morning, she arrived, shortly before the meeting's 8 a.m. start looking smart. At one point during the session the client

remarked that some information seemed to be missing. The partner shot Anna a glance of annoyance before covering up his feelings with the hearty remark, 'Well, she's new on the job. We'll let her get away with it just this once.' To cover her fury and shame, Anna put on what she calls her 'smiley face', a big toothy grin, and offered to find the missing materials. Anna's teeth were clenched, and her eyes didn't crinkle (a sign of a sincere smile). She was tired, hurt, and humiliated and anyone paying attention would have seen she was giving a fake grin.

Look for all the signs. Fake gestures are meant to deceive.

Micro gestures: A little gesture means a lot

Teeny weeny, so small that they sometimes take highly specialised equipment to see them, micro gestures are flashes of emotion that flicker across your face faster than a hummingbird, revealing feelings that you may prefer to keep to yourself. These gestures aren't ones that you purposely choose. Micro gestures give a brief hint of what's going on inside. You choose to smile, wave, and rise from a chair. You don't choose to have a micro gesture flicker across your face. No one is immune to them.

A list of the more common micro gestures include

- Movement around the mouth
- Tension at the eyes
- Flaring of the nose

Mark and Liz met at a party. They were immediately attracted to one another. They stood easily in the other's intimate space. Their facial gestures were controlled, but the occasional flicker around Liz's eyes and hint of a smile around Mark's mouth gave the impression that a frisson existed between the two. Friends and family members recognised the signs and frequently ask about the relationship between Liz and Mark.

Displacement gestures

When you're feeling conflicting emotions, you may engage in gestures that have no relation to your immediate goals. These

behaviours are mostly self-directed and serve to release excess energy and gain a feeling of comfort, even if only temporary. Drumming fingers, flicking feet, going for a glass of water when you're not even thirsty – these are the behaviours of someone who's looking to burn some pent up energy, or at least, refocus it. Called displacement activities, they're a conduit for excess energy that's looking for a place to go.

Some examples of displacement gestures are

- Fiddling with objects
- Tugging at your earlobe
- Straightening your clothes
- Stroking your chin
- Running your fingers through your hair
- Eating
- Smoking

Some smokers light up a cigarette, take a puff or two, and then put it out or leave it in the ashtray barely smoked. These people may not actually want the cigarette, but need a gesture to take their mind off something else.

ANECDOTE

I knew the time had come to stop smoking when I had three cigarettes on the go in a four-room apartment. I was working in New York, living on my own, making barely enough to pay my monthly bills, and wondering what I was doing with my life. I was frustrated and feeling anxious. One morning, while I was in the kitchen making coffee, I lit up a cigarette. When the phone rang, I answered it in the living room, leaving the cigarette burning in the kitchen. While speaking on the phone to my soon-to-be ex-husband I lit another cigarette which, after a drag or two, I stubbed out in the ashtray on my desk. I went to the bathroom to get ready for work. Here, too, I lit a cigarette, which I occasionally puffed on as I applied my make-up. In the course of less than 10 minutes I had lit three cigarettes, none of which I was interested in smoking.

Rather than stating their feelings verbally, people demonstrating displacement activities are letting their gestures reveal their emotion.

Prince Charles is noted for fiddling with his cufflinks. He crosses his arm over his body and touches his cufflinks in a protective and reassuring gesture. The Prince is displacing his anxiety by making contact with his cufflinks. On honeymoon with Diana, the late Princess of Wales, Charles is purported to have worn cufflinks given to him by his current wife, the Duchess of Cornwall. No wonder that his young bride was upset when she discovered this wedding gift of gold cufflinks with entwined Cs. Especially when she saw him fondling them.

Words convey information. Gestures reveal attitude. If someone's feeling anxious she may fiddle with her keys, twist the ring on her finger, or pull at her clothes to compensate for her anxiety.

If you see someone under pressure and being scrutinised, look to see what her hands are doing. If she's gently rubbing her stomach, you may assume that she's feeling the pressure and is calming and comforting himself, the way you comfort a baby or sick child.

Universal gestures

Universal gestures, such as blushing, smiling, and the wide-eyed expression of fear, mean the same thing across world cultures. These gestures stem from human biological make-up, which is why you can recognise them spanning the globe.

Smiling

From the sands of Iraq to the shores of Malibu, humans are born with the ability to smile. From the earliest days in an infant's life, her facial muscles can form the upward turn of the lips and the crinkling around the outer edges of the eyes to create a recognisable smile.

Sure, each person may have her own unique way of smiling. The point remains that anyone with working facial muscles who's conveying a positive message lifts her lips in pleasure.

When you see the sides of the lips turned up and the eyes crinkling at their outer edges, count on that smile being genuine in showing pleasure.

The Japanese smile in embarrassment as well as pleasure. Young women giggle behind their hands. Don't expect the Japanese to respond to your humour with a raucous, belly laugh.

Blushing

If you blush, your embarrassment's showing. The blood flows to your chest and cheeks, and you want to drop down and hide. Go to Thailand, go to Alabama, or any country: You see this gesture everywhere when embarrassment takes over.

To control the blushing take several slow, deep breaths from your diaphragm to steady your nerves and control the blood flow.

My Aunt MarNell lives in Dallas, Texas and is the perfect combination of cowgirl and southern belle. When Dad, MarNell's only sibling and adored brother, raised his glass in special toast to her, her cheeks flushed like a young girl's.

Crying

Crying is a universal sign of sadness. One of an infant's first actions is to let out a walloping great cry when she first enters this world, having been torn for the comfort and safety of her mother's womb. No one had to teach her, she was born knowing how.

If you feel tears well up in your eyes and you want to stop them from flowing down your face, fix your gaze at that point where the ceiling and wall meet.

Shrugging

Shrugging is a gesture that people use when they need to protect themselves in some way. The full shrug is when your head dips into your rising shoulders, the sides of your mouth turn down, your palms turn upwards, and you raise your eyebrows.

The shrug can indicate

- Indifference
- Disdain
- Unknowing
- Embarrassment

To know which attitude is being expressed, you have to look to see what the other body parts are doing.

I was invited to speak at an event for Women in Technology. I made the mistake of sitting at the panel table before making my presentation, rather than joining them afterwards. When the host introduced me her comments were so glowing that I felt embarrassed. I had set myself up for all to see and, rather than squaring my shoulders and lifting my head with pride, I dropped my head and lifted my shoulders in a humble shrug, as if seeking protection. What saved me from looking like a complete idiot was the sparkle in my eye and the bounce in my step when I took to the floor.

Getting the Most Out of Body Language

Successful people know how to use their bodies for greatest effect. They stand tall, with their chests opened like a well loved book, smiles on their faces, and when they move, they move with purpose. Their moderate and carefully chosen gestures reflect their sense of what they want to project and how they want to be perceived.

Successful people also know where to position themselves in relation to other people. They know that if they stand too close they can be perceived as overwhelming or threatening. They know that if they stand too far away they can be perceived as distant. They know how to anticipate movements – theirs and another's – to avoid (or not) bumping into someone else, depending on their motives, and their relationship with the other person. They know that the gestures they use and how they use them have infinitely more of an impact than the words they say.

The people who demonstrate respect for others, who think before acting, and who develop the necessary skills to create their desired outcomes, are the ones who feel good about themselves. You can tell by the way they move. Their gestures and actions have purpose and meaning.

If you want to succeed in your career or relationship, using effective body language is part of your foundation. Once you're aware of the impact – of what works and what doesn't – you can move and gesture with confidence, knowing that you and your message are perceived the way you want them to be.

Becoming spatially aware

Understanding how to position themselves in relation to other people is a skill that some people just don't seem to have. Either they're so up close and personal that you can smell their morning coffee breath, or they stand just that bit away that makes them appear uninterested, unengaged, or slightly removed. Others, however, know just how to get it right. They understand and respect the different territories and parameters that people have around themselves, and being with them is comfortable.

You have a personal, individual space bubble that you stand, sit, and move around in, and it expands and contracts depending on circumstances. Although you may have grown up in the country and have need for a lot of space around you, people who grew up in cities need less.

The study of *proxemics*, how people use and relate to the space around them to communicate, was pioneered by Edward T Hall, an American anthropologist in the 1960s. His findings revealed the different amounts of personal space that people feel they need depending on their social situation. Robert Sommer, an American psychologist, coined the term 'personal space' in 1969. He defined it as the 'comfortable separation zone' people like to have around them.

Chapter 10 takes a look at how circumstances determine at what distance you're most comfortable, and how best to position yourself in relation to another person, whether standing, sitting, or lying down.

Anticipating movements

Movement can be equated to dance. It's more than just the gestures themselves, it's about the timing of them as well. Anticipating an action and registering that it's about to happen before it does, gives you information that others may not grasp.

The American anthropologist, Ray Birdwhistell, pioneered kinesics, the study of body movement and verbal communication. Replaying, in slow motion, films of people in conversation Birdwhistell was able to analyse people's actions, gestures, and behaviours.

Consider these examples:

- Spotting the subtle gestures a person makes in preparation for rising from a seated position previews what's about to happen.
- Recognising when a person's about to strike out in anger gives you enough time to protect yourself and others.
- Feeling your dancing partner shift his weight indicates that a change in movement is about to occur.

Anticipating a movement can save your life. It can keep you from harm. It may also bring you great happiness, like a lover's first kiss which, had you missed the movement, you may have lost. By anticipating gestures, you gain the upper hand in knowing how to respond before the action is completed.

Creating rapport through reflecting gestures

When you talk about establishing rapport you're talking about accepting and connecting with other people and treating one another with respect. Rapport assures that your communications are effective and lead to results that satisfy both parties' needs.

You have many ways of creating rapport, through touch, word choice, and eye contact. Another way is to reflect another person's movements. By mirroring and matching the other person's gestures and behaviours you're demonstrating that you know what it feels, sounds, and looks like to be in her shoes. If connecting with others and behaving respectfully is important to you, mirroring and matching their behaviour helps you achieve that goal.

A fine line exists between reflecting another person's gestures and mimicking her. People who are being mimicked quickly figure out what you're doing and recognise your insincerity.

Becoming who you want to be

How you present yourself, how you move and gesture, how you stand, sit, and walk all play their part in creating the image you present and in determining people's perceptions. By adopting a cluster of postures, positions, and gestures known for the attitudes they effect, you can create any attitude and make it your own. Positive body language looks and feels strong, engaged, and vibrant. Negative body language communicates weaknesses, dullness, and a disconnectedness. Sometimes you want to project one image over another. Whatever image you want to project – moving your head, face, torso, and limbs with confidence, control, and commitment, or creating desired effects with the flick of your wrist or a furrow of your brow – being perceived and responded to in the way you want helps you to achieve your desired results.

Actors know the technique of creating a character from both within and without. Working from the outside in, actors consider how their character sounds, moves, and gestures. They ask themselves:

- How would the character walk, sit, and stand? Would the character move like a gazelle, lumber along like a sleepy bear, or stagger in a zigzag pattern like someone who's had one drink too many? Is the posture upright and erect, or slouched and limp?
- What gestures would be required for conveying a particular mood or emotion? Slow, deliberate, and carefully timed gestures create a different impression from those that are quick, spontaneous, and unfocused.

By adopting the appropriate behaviours, the actor creates an attitude, emotion, or feeling that the audience recognises and understands. It's the same for the lay person. By acting in a particular manner you can create an image and become that character. As Cary Grant said, 'I pretended to be someone I wanted to be until I finally became that person.'

The behaviour you adopt and the gestures that you make leave an impression. How you're perceived – dumb or sultry, champion of the people, or chairman of the board – is up to you. The key is to adopt/exhibit/display the right gestures. To do that, keep these points in mind:

- **Make sure that your gestures reinforce the impression you want to make:** For example, the higher up the command chain, the more contained the gesture (which is why you never see the chief executive run down the hall).
- **You can modify your gestures to suit the situation:** When Toby, my PA and I, are working in the office and no one else is around, our body language is loose and relaxed. When a client or another colleague arrives, the body language changes. We both become more formal, the degree of formality depending on the other person.

Decide what attitude you want to project. Model the gestures of a person who you think successfully emulates that image.

I recently experienced my first tax audit, which had me in a bit of a state. Tom, my bookkeeper, and my accountant Rashmi, tell me how much and where to sign and I do it. I trust them and Tom's been teaching me about the finances. Tom arrived at the office, wearing a suit and tie, for the meeting with the VAT lady. Our office is normally quite informal and Tom's change of clothes told me that we were to leave out the jokes. Although I was dressed informally I adjusted my behaviour to mirror Tom's, which was thoughtful, serious, and open. We wanted to create the impression that not only does the business have a strong creative base, but also that its financial backbone is firmly in place.

Reading the signs and responding appropriately

Being able to read other's signals is a stepping stone to effective communication. By observing how people move and gesture, you get a glimpse into their emotions. You can tell, for example, the intensity of someone's feelings by the way she stands. You can see what kind of mood a person's in by the speed of her gestures. By having an insight into someone's feelings you're forewarned and forearmed for whatever may happen next.

Say that you're at a party with a friend. You notice her sitting dejectedly by herself. Seeing her in this position, with her head hanging down and her arms wrapped around her body, you know that she needs a little tender loving care. You gently put your hand on her arm and she begins to feel a bit better.

Later at the party you observe that some of the younger guests – who have had more than their fair share of drink – are beginning to go from jovial to rowdy. You notice the lads pushing and shoving one another, which is your sign to leave.

By reading body language effectively, you can tell when you can stay and when to go.

Edith unexpectedly popped around to have a chat with her neighbours, Tim and Sarah, who were in the middle of a busy morning and had little time to stop for a gossip. Although Tim smiled warmly at Edith, he stood by the entrance without inviting her in. His arms were crossed over his chest, his legs were held closely together, and rhythmically he rocked backwards and forwards on his toes. Edith sensed from Tim's closed position that now was not a convenient time for them to speak, and she quickly left.

Appreciating Cultural Differences

How much more exciting, interesting, and stimulating it is to live in a world with difference and diversity, rather than one in which everything's the same. Even though you appreciate the differences between cultures and nationalities, you may sometimes find yourself confused, scared, or even repelled by displays of body language that are very different from what you're used to.

Because people in one culture act differently than people in another doesn't suggest that one is right and the other is wrong. When it comes to cultural differences, the operative

verbs are 'to respect' and 'to value'. Valuing behaviours that vary so much from those that you grew up with, and were taught to believe in, can be hard. To create respectful, positive relationships between different cultures and nationalities, you need to expand the way you think and work, from an attitude of respect. That doesn't mean having to agree with all the behaviours you see in your travels. Instead, accept that differences do exist, and then decide how best to respond.

Chapter 12 looks at different cultures and how behaviour and body language impact upon communication between nations.

Different nationalities and cultures use their bodies differently. An acceptable gesture in one country may land you in jail in another. Before visiting or moving to another country, do your homework and find out what's suitable and what's not. Before making a gesture, think whether it's appropriate and acceptable before doing so.