

# Your Screaming Body Language

By Kevin Hogan

You're having what you consider to be a pretty important conversation over dinner.



The ambience?

Excellent.

Everything is running smoothly this evening. You couldn't have asked for better. The new suit fits particularly well and the color, much to your surprise, worked.

You've been talking for what seems like 5 minutes. You got on a roll and stayed there. You painted a vivid picture and you can tell she is there.

She's sitting right in front of you and she is completely unaware that she is fixing her hair.

You unconsciously mirror her behavior.

You smooth your hair.

She consciously recognizes that she feels uncomfortable and a little nervous.

"I think we should go for it."

You smile a deep heartfelt genuine smile.

She instantly thinks, no way.

It's out of nowhere and she has no idea why she feels that way. She's a little surprised, but she has come to trust her gut on all things.

"Let me think about it."

You're dumbfounded.

## 90 Miles an Hour ... to Instant Stop

Everything was going well right up until this second.

"Sorry?"

"I'll think about it."

You heard right. She is going to think about what not ten minutes ago she said, "I definitely want to do that!"

What the heck happened?

The expression on your face is quizzical and perhaps a bit stunned.

She instantly spots the furrowed brow, slightly open mouth, and the eye lids drawing closer to each other as your chin pushes to the right just a bit while your head tilts slightly back and to the left.

*He thinks I'm being stupid? Why are you giving me that look? What a jerk.*

"What's wrong?"



The tone is not terribly distrusting or hostile, but you've just experienced a temperature change of arctic proportions. You snap out of it.

"Nothing at all."

But it's too late.

Ten minutes ago she was definitely going to do it.

Now everything has changed.

"When would you like me to call you about it?"

You try to recover. You weren't prepared for her chilly response and now you have to try and capture that warm breeze again, but you well know that isn't going to happen.

Everything had been moving ideally. Perfect. Nothing could have gone wrong, but a sinkhole couldn't have swallowed a car in Chicago faster than she sucked the energy out of your brain.

"Doesn't matter. Sometime next week I guess," the temperature continues to go down.

*He's really trying to pressure me. I don't like it. I'm not sure I even like him. I think I was wrong about him.*

What happened?

What could possibly have gone wrong?

You fiddled with your hair for 1 second while you were delivering “the closing statement.”

She has been around thousands of humans in her life. She has no idea that her brain has connected people who she’s listening to and the triggers of the one person who lied to her when she smoothed her hair years ago. She doesn’t remember it. She wouldn’t remember it. It’s long buried from consciousness. But the hidden in plain sight Anxiety Trigger remains and probably will for the rest of her life.

You did absolutely nothing wrong. Not really.

You smoothed your hair while asking her to go for it and her brain wired in a gut kick of adrenaline and cortisol release that changed her nonconscious liking to nonconscious fear to conscious fear to politely backing off and simply disliking you.

1 second.

You couldn’t have known until today.

And now you know.

## **Body Language Signals: The Clean Delivery**

When you deliver a message that matters you don’t touch anything. You don’t touch the wine glass. You don’t touch your glasses. You don’t touch the table. You don’t touch a fork. You don’t touch...anything. These are all COMMON FEAR TRIGGERS for people in conversation to experience.

Every single day people miss opportunities in all aspects of life by switching “yes” to “no” through internal triggers.

You simply tripped her “Fear Switch.”

You wouldn’t have done it in a million years. Obviously. But her gut directs her brain, and her brain, in this case, is directing her mind, and that means you are hearing “no.”

She’ll go home or visit a friend and explain what happened.

And she won’t be able to.

“I don’t know, I just got a bad feeling about him. He’s a bit of a jerk.”

“I thought you wanted to go for it with this guy?”



"I did but he blew it. I saw who he really is."

You went from deity to someone Dante sees in the Inferno in one second.

People ask me all the time, "what are the most important body language signals?"

Answer?

"It's the one that triggers a cortisol release in the brain. It's the one that kicks in the fear and anxiety that you couldn't have known without having watched a video of the person's life."

If you're going to "gesture" while communicating the big suggestion, it better be intentional, certain, and illustrate the proposal brilliantly.

What's that mean?

### **Body Language Fear Triggers**



Common fiddling and gestures are the most experienced fear triggers. If a person hears 100 positive things and 20 negative things over a year where the communicator makes any specific gesture (a touch to the nose, straightening of the hair, touching the lips, wetting the lips, rubbing the eyes, scratching the ear), the 20 negatives overwhelm the 100 positives. 100 positives is like 100 goldfish in an ocean of 20 negative experiences.

Recognizing their nonverbal cues matters. It can matter a lot.

But the reality is that being aware of YOUR RESPONSE & BEHAVIORS to their nonverbal cues which they then observe, are really where problems begin. This is the most common place for "yes" to become "no."

### **Learn Body Language: Break it Down**

Mirroring their behavior can build rapport. It can create simple bonding. But it can also backfire. This doesn't happen because someone becomes aware of your mirroring them. That moment might happen once in a lifetime.

The beginning point of disaster is when they have a negative reaction triggered by a gesture or cue you offered up, probably nonconsciously. You didn't know it happened. You didn't think anything. You didn't mean anything. You didn't consciously do anything. You simply reacted as a normal human does and it happened to be one of those things.

And it goes further.

## Body Language Strategy: Acute Awareness

As you observe people's nonverbal communication, you must be present. They are not. You could ask them, "are you here" and they of course will say "yes." But the fact is that they are barely here. You must be present and aware of their behaviors because if you like this person, you'll naturally yawn when they yawn. That could be a great thing. Most of the time you could bet on it.

But...don't kid yourself into thinking that one person catching another person's yawn IS a liking signal. It CAN BE. IT MIGHT BE.

Bodies don't read popular self-help literature about body language.

They simply react to one stimulus after another. People rarely react positively. They can. It does happen. It's not all that common. For every 100 negative "reactions", there are perhaps 5 positive reactions.

How can you possibly know all the body language cues people exhibited while communicating in some negative fashion with the person you are talking to right now?

Obviously you can't, but you can make some broad generalizations.

### Decoding Body Language: Negative Gestures to Avoid



You can predict that most of the time someone was **pointed at** in their life, the feelings the person exhibited in the most intensely bad moments were indeed negative.

You can predict that most of the time someone saw people **with an angry expression on their face**, they themselves were not experiencing anything good. (This is a challenge I have. I tend to scowl when I'm

intensely focused. My look of determination looks like a lot of people's "I want to kill you right now," look.)

You can predict that an **elevating volume of voice** is generally negatively experienced by most people. What you are certain is passionate is felt as antagonizing by more than not. This is true regardless of the content.

### Reading Body Language: Brains are Trigger Dependent

They don't think. They simply experience triggers. They certainly do absorb information, but the body's job is to keep you away from fear. That is the primary objective.

Once your mortality is confirmed, the body will then generally seek out comfort, food, or sex.

The key point here is to recognize that you can be emotionally intelligent enough to interpret their reactions to you...and *they* almost certainly won't be.

In no way does this mean you are in "complete control." On the contrary, you haven't seen a complete video of every moment of that person's life. You have no idea which 100 gestures and cues are the biggest negative triggers for them.

You also have no assurance on which few gestures or cues might actually be a positive trigger.

And knowing a few positive feeling triggers can be a very good thing, indeed.

### **Body Language Strategy: Turn Fear into Excitement!**



When you and I hang out with someone "new", our conscious mind is far more alert than it typically would be. If someone is conscious 10% of the time, their conversation with you will probably show them to be in consciousness as much as 30% of the minutes you are with them. That heightened sense of awareness is critical.

The heart beats faster when "new people" are around. "Excitement" is often felt as "fear" and "fear" is often felt as "excitement" because they are essentially the same thing. The difference is the interpretation of the conscious mind briefly checking on the

nonconscious body experience.

How do you cause people to consciously experience their "fear" as "excitement?"

You have to catch it early. You have approximately one second.

"Cool?!"

"Exciting?!"

"Nice?!"

"Wow!"

Pick a word from an ordinary deck of words. It needs to be articulated quickly and the accent on that last sound or letter must be experienced with a rising pitch in your voice.

When with new people, we are much more present than we are with old people where we tend to be comfortable and run old patterns (good or bad) of behavior, instantly falling back to nonconsciousness.

Returning to nonconsciousness means whatever has occurred in the environment is comfortable and/or familiar. Point? There is no imminent threat present. The brain turns on as the mind turns down.

**Bodies don't like to be in consciousness because being conscious requires the experience of STRESS.**

### **Body Language Signals: Predictably Positive**

OK, a positive body language trigger?

Remembering that every single person is different, there are some cues that are predictably positive.

When your face, your eye level is closer to the ground than that of the other person, they are more likely to experience control, comfort and possibly even feelings of love and connection.

Why?

When you were really little, your Mom or Dad probably got down low to look at you when they spoke to you. If you had a crummy Mom or Dad, this probably didn't happen, but most people have generally positive experiences with adults when their face is at their level or lower.

I don't need to hang out with 5-year olds but they tend to like me. I can't shake them. Why? Because I immediately get down to "their level" and live in their world. Adults don't do this, which is why kids talk to a lot of thighs when they are little. Beyond the big stomach, they can only see a chin, a nose and some hair if they are close enough to an adult. Thighs have their upside but not for kids. Thighs offer little expression as far as love, connection, empathy.

Meanwhile, the few people who actually get down to the level of the child, they tend to be liked.

The same is true of adults.



If you can bring your eyes to a plane that is closer to the ground than theirs, you'll PROBABLY trigger positive feelings.

Probably.

Very little good happens when people tower over another person. Most negative triggers include that factor. Most non-negative triggers include someone being below their current eye level.

If you're 6' 5" and she is 5' 6" you have your work cut out for you.

In cases like this, physical distance from the other person can be slightly increased so that you don't appear to be an adult to their child, even if they are 40.

Next week, we'll talk about more cues and clues to nonverbal experience both from your point of view and theirs so you can optimize each interaction and cause as many positive feelings as possible while bringing out fewer negative reactions.

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