

20 Oct 2010
Ottawa Citizen

Beware, body language counts at interviews

You're in a job interview. You're at a professional association meeting. You're in a meeting with your bosses. You're being watched.

In any of these situations, whether you're trying to get, keep or advance in a job, you're being evaluated in ways far beyond your actual job performance.

Your posture, your gestures, your eye contact, your facial expressions — all are creating impressions that could help or hurt you.

At the risk of sounding like a carping parent, here are some real-life reminders, culled from a CareerBuilder survey of 2,500 hiring managers:

- Don't slump. Good posture conveys confidence and health.
- Make eye contact. It's part of good relationship-building.
- Don't fidget. Picking at your face, hair or clothes suggests nervousness.
- Shake hands firmly. Again, the confidence thing.
- Smile. Be friendly, as appropriate. But don't look like a bobblehead doll nodding agreeably at everything.
- Be aware of body language. Crossing your arms, positioning your body sideways to the speaker or physically backing away from the conversation can convey disagreement or lack of interest.

The tried-and-true advice to prepare for nerve-racking encounters is to practise for the expected encounter. Stand in front of a mirror and talk to yourself. Yes, you may feel silly, but you'll see yourself as others see you.

Better yet, ask someone to videotape you in a practice interview.

I recall a friend who saw a tape of herself and others taken while they sat on stage during a ceremony. She was shocked to see how often she shifted position and moved her arms and legs compared with everyone else.

Her squirms didn't matter in that situation, of course. But, if translated to an important business meeting, such excessive movement could make people think she's inattentive or too hyper to concentrate. Calm. Confident. Pleasant. That's what you want to project — even when your insides are roiling with nerves.

~ BY DIANE STAFFORD, MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS ~