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[**The body language of collaboration**](http://smartblogs.com/leadership/2011/07/13/the-body-language-of-collaboration/)

By [Carol Kinsey Goman](http://www.ckg.com/) on July 13th, 2011 | [Comments (0)](http://smartblogs.com/leadership/2011/07/13/the-body-language-of-collaboration/" \t ")

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*[Carol Kinsey Goman](http://www.ckg.com/" \t "_blank) is the author of  “The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help — or Hurt — How You Lead,” an expert contributor for The Washington Post’s [“On Leadership”](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership" \t "_blank) column, a [leadership blogger](http://blogs.forbes.com/carolkinseygoman/" \t "_blank) on Forbes.com and a columnist for “The Market” magazine.*

Most leaders agree that effective collaboration is more important than ever in today’s turbulent business environment. But the collaboration so critical to organizations is being blocked by internal power struggles, by a lack of unified goals and rewards, by a self-preservation instinct that results in information hoarding — and, perhaps surprisingly, by the body language of leaders.

All leaders express enthusiasm, warmth and confidence as well as arrogance, indifference and displeasure through their expressions, gestures, touch and use of space. As such, your nonverbal signals can either increase collaboration or shut it off.

Here are four body language tips for collaboration:

**1) Look like you’re listening.**

Whenever your body language signals boredom or disinterest, team members will react by holding back their comments. So if you want people to speak up, avoid the temptation to check your text messages, check your watch or check out how the other participants are reacting. Instead, focus on those who are speaking by turning your head and torso to face them directly and by making eye contact. It’s important to hear people. It’s just as important to make sure that they know you are listening.

**2) Use your head.**

To encourage someone to continue speaking, nod your head using clusters of three nods at regular intervals. I’ve found that people will talk much more than usual when the listener nods in this manner.

Head tilting is another signal that you are interested, curious and involved. The head tilt is a universal gesture of giving the other person an ear. As such, head tilts can be very positive cues when you want to encourage people to expand on their comments.

**3) Remove barriers.**

Physical obstructions are especially detrimental to the effective exchange of ideas. Take away anything that blocks your view or forms a barrier between you and the rest of the team.

Even at a coffee break, be aware that you may create a barrier by holding your cup and saucer in a way that seems deliberately to block your body or distance you from others. A successful sales executive told me he could evaluate his team’s comfort by how high they held their coffee cups. It was his observation that the more insecure individuals felt, the higher they held their coffee. People with their hands held at waist level were more comfortable than those with hands chest high.

**4) Activate your smile power.**

A genuine smile not only stimulates your own sense of well-being, it also tells those around you that you are approachable, cooperative and trustworthy. Most importantly, smiling directly influences how other people respond to you. When you smile at someone, they almost always smile in return. And, because facial expressions trigger corresponding feelings, the smile you get back actually changes that person’s emotional state in a positive way.

It’s simple, really. The body language of inclusion includes eye contact, smiling, head nods and body orientation. But don’t get fooled. These seemingly inconsequential behaviors are so powerful that they can dictate your success or failure as a collaborative leader.

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