

Essential body language tips

Unless you're someone who dreams of being on The Apprentice, a job interview can potentially be a nerve-racking and uncomfortable experience. The stress it generates can cause your body language to go haywire and send out unintended signals to the person reading them. Your feeling nervous or shy, for example, may be interpreted as defensiveness or aloofness.

Working on your body language prior to an interview, client meeting or any other stressful public event can have considerable benefits. Just acting more relaxed and confident can trick your mind into following suit. Here are some techniques for getting your body onside for when it matters.

1. Plan your entrance

30 seconds is reportedly how long it takes for some hiring managers to make up their mind, so how you greet your interviewer is crucial. A strong handshake goes without saying, while smiling and maintaining eye contact also helps to display confidence. Practice your entrance in the mirror (preferably when no one is watching...).

2. Develop your 'eye contact'

If you don't make eye contact people don't trust you, but for many of us it's a struggle, particularly when we're nervous. Also if you are deliberately trying to hold eye contact with anybody it can make you feel incredibly self-conscious and more likely to start looking at the ceiling. So practice when you're out with friends by choosing a point on the centre of their face to look at, round about the bridge of their nose. It'll help you to relax and become less self-conscious, they will never know and you'll find yourself making eye contact effortlessly.

3. Aim for a relaxed approach

Crossing your arms, sitting too far back or forward and averting your gaze can mean you come across as defensive, arrogant or disinterested - unlikely to be what you are going for! So along with your newfound eye contact skills, use some relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing just before the interview to help keep your nerves in check, and remember to sit up, keep your posture open and smile. It will make you feel more 'in the zone' and happier.

4. Stay focused

Feeling nervous or self-conscious can lead to involuntary movements -- shaking your foot, rubbing your neck or rocking back in your chair -- which can undermine the composed image you are trying to portray. Becoming aware of your body language in group situations should give you an idea of the kind of things to watch out for. Find an alternative action, such as taking a deep breath and adjusting your posture when you catch yourself making one of these unwanted movements.

Hopefully, a little pre-planning and preparation can take much of the stress out of the big day. With your body language in check, all that's left is for you to wow your interviewer into believing you're the right person for the job. Piece of cake, right?