

You Cannot Not Communicate

You may have noticed that it is impossible not to communicate with people? Or, to put it more positively, you may have noticed that through non verbal clues, as much as verbal interactions, you are communicating all the time?

Albert Mehrabian, currently Professor of Psychology at UCLA, has become well known for his work on the relative importance of verbal and non verbal messages. His results are often quoted, and misquoted, when discussing communication. In his research he came to two conclusions. Firstly that there are basically three elements in any face to face communication: words, tone of voice and body language. And secondly, when we are face to face we weigh the inputs we receive differently. He found that in receiving a message regarding feelings or attitudes we only rate the verbal part as 7% of the total message. The tone of voice accounts for 38% and body language for 55%. (Note Mehrabian never said words are only 7% of all communications - just those involving feelings and attitudes.)

So, we are all good at reading body language. However this means that, even if we are not speaking, we 'leak out' unconsciously to others around us a lot of information about our feelings and attitudes via body language, gestures etc. We are constantly communicating with people – when we walk into a room, sit in a meeting, and meet people for the first time. You cannot not communicate!

As you go through the day, what are you 'saying' with your unconscious, non-verbal communication?

We can also use Mehrabian's findings to help us build better rapport with others. Two of my favourite TV presenters are Bruce Parry and Michael Palin. What I find fascinating is that, although, very often, neither Bruce nor Michael can speak the language of the people they are reporting on, through great use of facial expressions, laughter, and body language they find ways to make strong person to person connections while using very few words.

Could you make stronger person to person connections by not just relying on the words to get your message across but also thinking about the delivery in terms of voice, gestures and body language?

Food for thought?

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