

From the moment you walk onto the field or court, you're talking to everyone who lays eyes on you. I'll show you how to make a statement without ever opening your mouth and teach you the secret language of ...



BODY

SPEAK

By Dr. Peter Sacco, Ph.D

In the locker room before a big game your partner is pacing back and forth, wringing his hands; his lips are pursed and his brow is crinkled.

"You nervous?" you ask.

"No, no, not all," he replies.

You believe him, right? Because he *said* he wasn't nervous.

It's estimated by social psychologists that on any given day, anywhere from 75-90 percent of our communication is of a non-verbal nature. That's a sobering statistic. Before you even open your mouth to speak, people have already "heard" you through your body movements.

In officiating, maybe more than in most other activities, it's what you say when you're not saying anything at all that counts the most. After all, according to legend, the first umpiring signals were invented to accommodate a deaf player, Dummy Hoy, in the 1880s.

Non-verbal signals these days are just part of the job. Fields are large and courts are noisy, making verbal communication difficult, if not downright impossible in some cases. Your signals can be clear and precise, but don't think for a second that when you're punching a third strike or raising your arms for a touchdown those are the only times people are reading your body language.

While officiating signals are purposeful, much of the rest of your non-verbal communication is unconscious — you often aren't even aware you're doing it or what messages you're sending with it. To become a more effective official, it's as simple as taking a quick primer on the science of body language.

What is Body Language?

Body language encompasses *all* non-verbal communication, and when it comes to communication, perception is everything (well, at least 75-90 percent of everything).

It's like the conventional wisdom of making a first impression — it's not usually what you say that's remembered so much as what you show. Have you ever watched an official, someone you've never seen before, go overboard with his whistle blowing? You'd swear he was blowing the whistle just because he loves the sound of it. Without ever talking to that official, what would you interpret? "That guy gets off on his own power. He just likes to be at the center of everything. I wouldn't want to work with him!"

Referees who carry themselves with confidence look like someone in charge of the game rather than one who appears lackadaisical or uncertain

throughout the entire match. Players and coaches pick up on the official who lacks confidence. They smell the blood in the water and attack like sharks. That tends to further weaken the official's ability to facilitate the game and it then appears like a match between both teams versus the official.

How Does Your Body "Speak"?

Your body movements and facial expressions — many of which are very subtle — are the visual evidence players and coaches pick up on. While they may not even be consciously aware of those non-verbal cues and chalk it up to getting a "sense" that the official could be

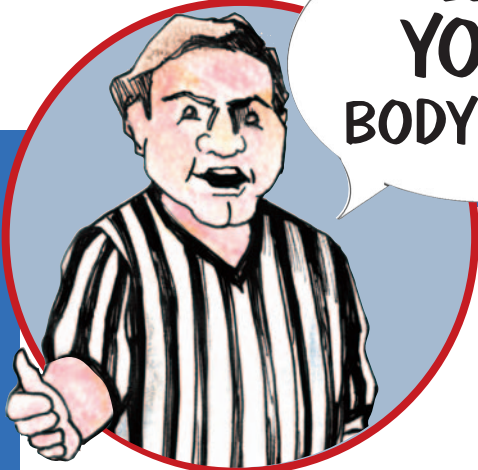
intimidated, those players and coaches are actually reading your body language.

Posture — How you carry yourself is a critical element that reveals your level of confidence on the playing surface. Referees who maintain a straight, upright posture with squared shoulders show that they possess confidence, commitment and strength. On the other hand, running around the field or court with retracted shoulders, which push the chest out, tell others, "Stay away from me. I'm pissed off." Officials who have raised shoulders and a lowered head show a sense of fear and anxiety. They're telling others they are uncomfortable officiating, afraid of making mistakes and blown calls and fearful of confrontation. That's a sure way to make yourself a target for abuse. Finally, referees who walk around with bowed and slouched shoulders are telling others, "I'm stressed and defeated." They want to get the game over with as soon as possible because they would rather be somewhere else.

Limb positioning — The way officials position their arms and legs during meetings with players and coaches throughout a game says a lot. Keeping your arms tightly folded tells others, "I am closed

LET YOUR BODY TALK

BODY LANGUAGE DECODED



Uncertainty Cues



Why do we do them? They are physical nervous reactions to doubt, performed unconsciously. Most people are unaware they are even showing such cues.

What do they mean? In officiating, they mean others can "see you sweat." Common uncertainty cues include: an involuntary sideward eye movement, side-to-side headshakes, a head tilted to the side, tense mouth, pursed lips and many self-touch gestures, such as touching the forehead, mouth or chin. Men will often rub their chins with their hand, tug at the lobes of their ears or rub their forehead, cheeks or back of the neck.

Women, on the other hand, often either put a finger on their lower front teeth with the mouth slightly open or pose a finger under the chin.

The Blank Face



Why do we do it? It's a baseline "emotionless" face, the muscle tone of which reflects a mood of calmness. Officials are often taught to use the "blank face" when listening to an irate coach or player.

What does it mean? Though "expressionless," the blank face sends a strong emotional message: "Do not disturb." In shopping malls, elevators or subways, we adopt neutral faces as a subtle sign to keep others a polite distance away.

The Arm-Cross



Why do we do it? A self-comforting, self-stimulating posture, unconsciously used to alleviate anxiety and social stress.

What does it mean? With arms and elbows pulled tightly into the body, the gesture may reveal acute nervousness or chronic anxiety. Held less tightly against the chest, with elbows elevated and projecting outward (away from the body), the arm-cross presents a guard-like stance, suggestive of arrogance, disliking or disagreement.

Hands on Hips



Why do we do it? As a nonverbal cue, the posture shows that the body is poised to "step forward" and defend against those who "overstep their bounds." The outward-bowed elbows widen, expand and visually enlarge the upper body, making it look more powerful in size.

What does it mean? The gesture is produced unconsciously when people are irritated about something; it means, "Keep away from me." Hands on hips is an unconscious action we perform when we feel anti-social in a social setting. It is often observed in athletes when they have just lost a vital point, game or contest.

off and not open to suggestions and discussion. It's my way or the highway." On the other hand, officials who talk with arms loose and legs slightly open are more likely to listen and let people be heard. That tells others their input is important and that they're willing to listen.

Movement — Officials who keep up with the play and run up and down the field with sharp, powerful strides let players know they are fit and possess stamina. People are more inclined to respect such officials.

Some players have pointed out that referees who run with closed fists and walk fast on and off the field tend to be those officials who don't take any crap.

Facial expressions — Finally, facial expressions show your level of interest, involvement and passion for the game. If you often yawn, sigh or roll your eyes, it tells others your heart

is not in it. Officials who smile and nod their heads when spoken to are more likely to foster the respect of players and coaches. Both will tend to view the official as a facilitator of the game rather than the stern law of the land.

How to "Talk" the Walk

How do you convey the messages you want to get across in a positive way? The best way is to practice improving your body language. That will help you be more conscious of what your body is conveying and you'll be able to send the most professional message possible — even if in reality you are



SEND THE RIGHT MESSAGE

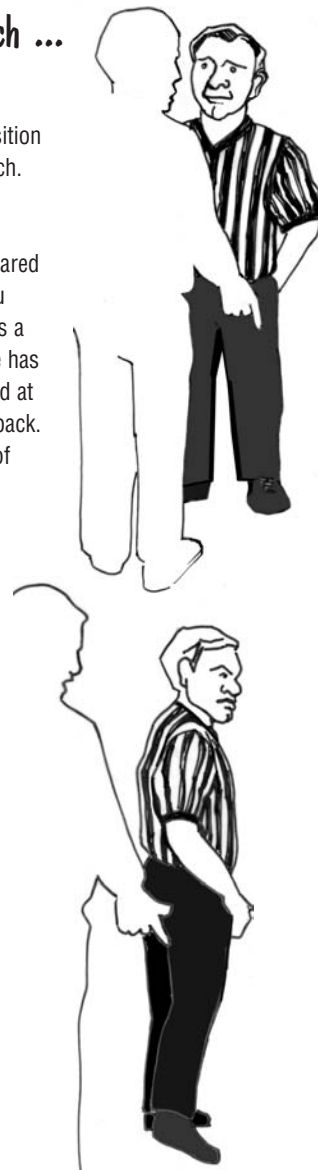
Visit the *Referee* website for more helpful advice on how to improve a situation through the use of good body language.



When dealing with an irate coach ...

Do this: Make eye contact and position your body face to face with the coach. That shows the coach a couple of things. First, it tells the coach you possess confidence and won't be stared down. Second, it tells the coach you respect him both as a person and as a coach and you will listen to what he has to say. Hold your arms either relaxed at your sides or crossed behind your back. That conveys openness and a lack of fear or anxiety.

Don't do this: Do not look away or walk away when the coach is trying to talk to you. That shows disrespect to the coach and may subtly show fear of confrontation to the coach. The only time an official should walk away from a coach is *after* the official has taken whatever appropriate action is called for. Do not cross your arms in that situation since it indicates you are defensive.



uncertain, stressed, anxious or angry.

1. Identify your problem areas.

Have someone videotape your games. In between games, look to see what you are doing positively and what aspects of your non-verbal communication need practice. Make conscious notes of what needs improvement: eye contact, posture, movements, facial expressions, and make sure to pay attention to them in the next game you officiate.

2. Accept feedback as constructive criticism from your peers. Seek out the opinions of your fellow officials, asking them, "How do I look out there?" If other officials bring up aspects of your game that could use improvement, accept what they are saying as ways of

optimizing your game. Try to avoid taking their remarks as personal attacks; rather, view them as lessons for more success.

3. Observe, model and emulate officials you respect. No official is scrutinized more than those in professional sports, so it's not a bad idea to watch how they carry themselves. Use them as guides to learn more assertive ways for managing your body language in your own games.

4. Take assertiveness training courses. Even if they are not related to sports, most assertiveness and public speaking courses teach participants the value of positive body language signals. You are taught the tools to achieve success in all areas of your life, even officiating.

Action literally speaks louder than words. Even before the whistle is blown or the first pitch is thrown, how you walk on the field and face everyone involved in the contest can determine what type of game you are going to have.

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During downtime of a game ...

Do this: Go to a safe area away from players and coaches. Stand erect, yet relaxed, showing you are loose yet ready to commence in a moment's notice. Hold a "blank face" expression and observe the players from a distance. An arms — folded stance is OK as long as nervous pacing or shuffling feet does not accompany it.



Don't do this: Even if you are fatigued, don't droop your posture. Do not sit down unless it's an extended break from the game such as halftime and you are visibly removed from onlookers. Avoid standing with your hands on hips, which could indicate aggressive anxiety. Steer clear of pained or annoyed facial expressions.



When discussing a call with your partner ...

Do this: Always take your partner aside away from the play. That shows respect for your partner and, spacially, it tells players and coaches to stay away. Within that private conference area, huddle close, folding your arms across your chest. That sends an even stronger message to onlookers to "stay away." When speaking, casually hold a hand near your mouth, which muffles your voice and helps camouflage any unconscious facial contortions. Nodding of the head is fine, as it indicates obvious agreement.



Don't do this: Avoid huddling near players or openly indicating a player or location on the field or court through a gesture of any kind. Do not send easily read cues of disagreement such as shrugging or drooping your shoulders, shaking your head, pointing at your partner or throwing your hands in the air. Also, facial expressions of any kind should be avoided, especially rolling the eyes or grimacing in a pained manner. Even "happy" expressions such as smiling or patting your partner on the shoulder could be interpreted to mean something you don't want.

