

Comfort, distress and dominance: Reading body language

Non-technical skills training/discussion

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What's this discussion useful for?

- 7%–38%–55% rule: words-tone-body
- Everyone can read ~7 core emotions
- Comfort or distress (not deception) is harder
- *Changes* are what matters (need baseline, need gestalt)
- People attempt control
- Limbic system is hard to control



Discussion: Orientation

- Deliberate mirroring for rapport: good or bad?
- How do you signal you want the floor?

Signs of comfort

“Up and out” orientation

Signs of comfort

- Leaning forward
- Relaxed hands
- Deep breathing/upright open posture/strong voice
- Feet pointed at speaker
- Crossed feet
- Head tilt
- Defying gravity
 - “Happy feet”
 - High arms/fingertips
 - Chin up



Discussion: Comfort

- What are you thinking about?
- What signals “ready to go” or “I’m convinced”?
- What do you think about “power poses”?

Signs of distress

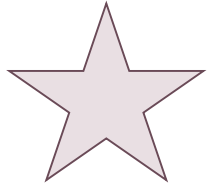
Freeze/flight/fight response followed by pacifying behaviors

Signs of distress: Freeze/flight/fight

- Freeze
 - Being small/still
 - Shallow breathing/hunched/thin voice
 - Closed posture
- Flight
 - Feet pointed at door
 - Leaning away from table
 - Touching purse/phone/laptop
- Fight
 - Puffed chest
 - Compressed lips/flaring nostrils
 - Breathing hard

Signs of distress: Pacifying behavior

- Blocking eyes, face and torso:
 - Covering neck
 - Rubbing forehead
 - Touch/rub neck
 - Touch/rub cheek
 - Touch/rub heart
 - Self-hug
 - Object in lap
 - Squint
 - At a table: Drop elbows to waist/hands to lap
- “Leg cleansing”, hand wringing
- “Ventilator” (collar or hair)
- Whistling/yawning



Discussion: Distress

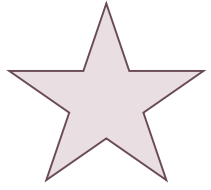
- What are you thinking about?
- What signals “I’m not bought in” or “I’m thinking of an alternative”?
- If you see mixed signals, which should you believe?

Signs of dominance

Being “big” and open to attack

Signs of dominance

- Taking up space
 - Possessions everywhere
 - Splayed legs
 - Arms akimbo
 - Prominent chest thrust
- Hands behind back
- Roving eyes
- “Cobra hooding”



Discussion: Dominance

- What are you thinking about?
- Where do you sit in meetings? How much space do you take up?
- What does it mean when you nod your head?

Homework ideas

Find someone with charisma – what are they doing with their body language?

Choose one sign and look for it everywhere

Analyze how a short powerful man projects that power