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What Lies Beneath

The consequences of your internal conversations



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IT HAS BEEN said that 93% of communication is non-verbal. But what does this mean? What is this element we call non-verbal communication, how does it appear, and how does it affect our day-to-day lives in the workplace and beyond?

First, it's important to know that there are five components of communication: thoughts, breathing, voice, body, and how we relate to the space around us. Let's look at something as basic as saying "hello." So, imagine two people saying "hello." Notice the timbre and pace of their voices, and the feel of the room. Let's

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add to this that one of the individuals is thinking, "I'm not happy with the amount of attention I've been getting from you." Now, how would the exchange go? How does their body language change, tone of voice, inflection and manner in which the message is received? Let's imagine two other internal contexts: that under the hello is "Wow, what a cool person." And yet another "hello" flavoured with "I don't have time for people like you."

It is the internal conversation that creates meaning within the context of the external conversation. The internal conversations influence various elements of the voice, such as the pace, speed, inflection, and pauses we choose. It also affects posture, walking habits, and even how you breathe.

Here's something that might surprise you. Breathing expresses emotion. What would you breathe like on a beach in Cuba? How would you say "hello?" Now imagine the pace you might breathe at in downtown Manhattan. How do you greet people? You might start to feel more stressed in New York than you did on the beach. Our breathing both expresses and creates our emotional state. If you breathe like someone who is panicking for five hours a day, you will likely feel more stressed at the end of that day. This is why breathing exercises help our well being and emotional state. Over

time, we develop breathing habits, inflection patterns, and attitudes about what outcomes will and won't be possible. Managing breathing and voice is imperative to creating a powerful presence in your professional life.

These breathing patterns can influence our voice, creating strain, nasality, or poor projection, even racing and girly tones. Our voice monitors the pace of a room through tonalities, pacing, and even the rhythm of our mother tongue. A great speaker uses the pause to bring people into a place of connection, and to move into the next idea. A well-placed pause can be magical for an audience.

We manage that magic with our physical language as well. Our body is expressive of our attitude to ourselves and others (as well as how we sit at our desks). Hunched shoulders compress the solar plexus and diaphragm, limiting our ability to project our voices, as well as influencing the confidence we display. Lifting and opening the solar plexus corrects computer-slumping shoulders. Just pulling your shoulders back releases tensions and shows confidence.

How we stand, speak, breathe and think all wrap themselves into an interesting package that influences the quality and strength of our sound. The icing on the cake is how we relate to the space around us. If you walk up to a boardroom table or a podium lost in your own thoughts, or if you look to the audience walking up to the podium and engage them—you will create a radically different impression upon your audience. Audiences are there to be included.

In the realm of public speaking, most people have not developed the tools to make public presentation efficient for themselves and others. On the bottom line, billable hours prior to and after a presentation are impacted, as well as the level of buy-in the speaker can create with the audience. Learning a few simple tools can assist in the company's overall brand image, as displayed by their employees, as well as generating sales and rapport with shareholders and stakeholders.

When it comes down to it—that 93% of communication is powerful for how you and your work team affect the marketplace, enjoy your lives, and make your mark in the world. ☺

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