

A large, dark, semi-transparent hourglass is positioned on the left side of the image, with sand falling from the top bulb to the bottom bulb. The background is a dark blue gradient.

**YOU'VE
GOT
SEVEN
SECONDS**

In the 1960s, Albert Mehrabian of UCLA did extensive research to understand the order of magnitude of verbal versus nonverbal communication. In his book, *Silent Messages*, he asserted that:

- 55 percent of communication is nonverbal—your bearing;
- 38 percent is vocal—the manner in which you engage; and
- 7 percent are words—choose carefully.

These judgments are being made at lightning speed. In fact, my own research suggests that people make decisions about you in the first seven seconds they see you. And it's these early judgments that often prove to be one of the key predictors as to whether your speech will be perceived positively or negatively.

Think about how much time you spend preparing for a presentation or speech. You spend hours honing your script, seeking to choose exactly the right words, only to pay no attention whatsoever to the visual judgments that your audience is bound to make about you each time you get up to speak.

Like it or not, without fail or exception, your audience is judging you. They're looking at the way you are standing, your dress, your eye contact, your bearing and are making silent judgments about you.

AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

We have just emerged from awards season for celebrities in the arts industry. No matter your personal interest, or lack thereof, many watch at least one of these shows to see what celebrities are wearing, who's winning what, what jokes are being told, etc.

Most of these individuals carry a great sense of confidence about them – as they should, they are clearly successful! However, it is still fascinating to watch the body language of some celebrities versus the mannerisms of a first-time recipient or a professional of a lesser-known area in the industry (e.g. writer, editor, etc.). Think about the great actor who steps on stage. People who carry themselves like they have a positive self-image—people brimming with optimism, hope, and confidence—tend to communicate those good feelings right along with their ideas.

You can have the same confidence, poise, and belief in yourself as any of these individuals giving acceptance speeches. Play the part of the individual you want to be and with every encounter—from conferences and meetings to training sessions and business lunches—make it your mission to meet people, network, and expand your professional contacts with greater confidence.

Your gestures and body movements should convince those around you that you are lively and energetic. Bring your mind, body, and spirit to every encounter and audience engagement. Making a positive first impression is critical. Remember, you have just seven seconds—but if you handle yourself in the right ways, seven seconds are all you need. If words are stripped away and the only communication left is body language, the truth will find its way to the audience. Before you stand and deliver, remind yourself that the body speaks before the mouth opens.

FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT

You've no doubt heard, used, and even applied this maxim to yourself or those around you. Fake it until you make it...or rather, actually become

it. There are plenty of studies that back up the notion that there is a lot of power in visualizing the achievement of goals that require strengths or skills we may not yet possess.

We are often plagued by inner doubts and a lack of confidence that can disable our ability to reach our fullest potential. Part of visualizing your success may require yourself to “fake” or deliberately force yourself to act with the confidence that is needed to progress toward your desired outcome. From motivational self-talk to transforming how you hold your body, these exercises achieve the same goal: greater confidence, yielding greater results.

How we stand, what we do with our hands and arms, how we hold our head, where we look, what we wear, how fast or slow we talk – these all communicate messages that your audience is often hearing just as much or more than the actual words you speak.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU COMMUNICATING? TAKE A LOOK FOR YOURSELF

There are several ways to become more aware of your natural non-verbal habits. One of the most effective exercises is to record yourself while speaking followed by watching/analyzing it. It doesn't get more telling than that – especially if you record yourself for longer than a few minutes; those natural tendencies will appear and you'll begin to understand what others see. As uncomfortable as it may be in the beginning, think about the benefits of actually seeing yourself in that way. Being aware allows you to be in greater control; and while you may not be able to immediately overcome all of your distracting habits, you can at least begin to eliminate them one by one.

Another exercise involves practicing your presentation or an anticipated conversation in front of the mirror. While it will be somewhat distracting at first, practice adjusting your mannerisms, stance, and facial expressions. Pretend like you're an actor in a dressing room; look into a mirror and begin to visualize how you want your communication to play out. Also, in preparation for a presentation, be cognizant of the following:

- Take stock of what you look like in the mirror. Don't be overly critical of your appearance but be objective. Did you cut yourself shaving? Clean it up. Are you wearing a suit or ensemble that doesn't quite fit right anymore? Find another set of clothes. Having a bad hair day? Take the time to fix your hair.
- What you don't want to do is distract your audience by having them think, “Hmmm ... something's out of place here. His tie is too short. His button is unbuttoned. Her blouse is covered with lint.” Because once an audience starts thinking about your appearance they're not going to remember a word you say.
- Try to assume a role the way an actor does. Carrying yourself with a positive self-image—communicate those positive messages and statement out loud to yourself.

We all know the adage, “actions speak louder than words” – and when it comes to speeches and body language, that can certainly apply. We make statements before we even say a word, how we dress, our posture and how we move and interact all send messages. Be in as much control as you can be and understand what your non-verbal messages are communicating.

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