

Chapter 4

GESTURES AND OTHER NONVERBAL COMMUNICATORS

Gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication can help you send and interpret messages when interacting with people from other cultures. These nonverbal communicators are especially useful when different languages are involved and people must rely on alternative methods of communicating. In addition to gestures, messages may be sent through the use of color, eye contact, facial expressions, paralanguage, posture, silence, smell, space and touch, and nonverbal leakage. Many nonverbal communicators are culture specific. Because nonverbal signals are interpreted immediately when they occur, whether they are judged in a positive or a negative manner is very important. You will want to investigate the nonverbals and their meanings before doing business in another country.

You also must understand that your nonverbal communication may be ambiguous in other cultures and be detrimental to relationship building. In the United States, nonverbals become even more difficult for foreigners because we are made up of many cultures. For example, Native American children avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect; however, you will not find this to be true of all Native Americans. Nonverbal signals are never completely reliable. As people are exposed to another culture, they tend to take on some of the nonverbal aspects of the culture; therefore, it becomes very difficult to interpret the nonverbal communicator's meaning unless you know the person fairly well. As Hall and Hall in *Understanding Cultural Differences* have stated, we learn nonverbal behavior in the context of growing up in a culture; it is invisible and omnipresent. We take it for granted and do not consciously think about it. As cultures interact through

travel, television, and business, the nonverbal signals of a culture change because they are learned behaviors.¹

GESTURES

Gestures perform an important function when people communicate nonverbally. They are useful in adding emphasis to what is said. When used at inappropriate times or with people of other cultures, however, they may cause confusion or misunderstanding. Thus, caution is advised when using gestures with persons of other cultures because what is perceived as positive in one culture may be viewed as negative or even obscene in another.

No gestures have universal meanings across cultures; meanings are culture specific. For example, the U.S. V for victory gesture (the index and middle fingers held upright with palm and fingers faced outward) is recognized as positive in many countries. In England, however, the gesture has a crude connotation when the palm is turned inward.²

Another related gesture with a positive connotation is the thumbs-up signal. Although this gesture means “good going” or “everything is great” to people of most European countries and North America, it has a rude connotation in Australia and West Africa.

Likewise, the OK sign (thumb and forefinger joined to form a circle) is positive to U.S. persons but considered obscene in Brazil. In France and Belgium, the gesture should be avoided as it means “worthless” or “zero.” The meaning of the gesture is completely different in Japan—it signifies money.

One example to illustrate problems that may result when gestures are used in intercultural interactions is the story of an American engineer who offended his German counterpart by giving the U.S. “OK” gesture (thumb and forefinger joined to form a circle) to indicate he had done a good job. After the German engineer walked off the job, the American engineer later learned why: the gesture meant “You asshole” to Germans.³

Using a beckoning gesture (palm facing the body with fingers upturned) is sometimes used (but not recommended in some sections of the United States) to get a server’s attention in a restaurant. Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Mexicans find this gesture offensive as it is used to call people considered inferior, such as prostitutes, and animals in these cultures.

The vertical horns gesture, which is a raised fist with the index finger and little finger extended, has a positive connotation in the United States; it is associated with the University of Texas Longhorn football team.

In Italy, however, it has an insulting connotation. In Brazil and Venezuela, however, it signifies good luck. This symbol should be used with discretion because it has various meanings in U.S. subcultures, including serving as a satanic cult recognition sign signifying the devil's horns.

Even shaking the head to mean "yes" or "no" differs according to the culture. Shaking the head from side to side in the United States means "no," but in Bulgaria the gesture signifies "yes."

People of the United States use moderate gesturing; they usually keep gestures fairly close to the body. The elbows do not go above shoulder level except when waving to someone. In addition, people of England, Germany, and Switzerland use few gestures. On the other hand, people of France, Italy, Spain, Greece, and the Middle Eastern countries, as well as people of most countries of Central and South America, are more effusive and expressive in their gesturing. Because most cultures have standard gestures used in their daily interactions, learning these gestures before visiting another culture is recommended.

During the Iraqi War in 2003, many U.S. people did not understand the significance of the Iraqi people's removing their shoes and using them to hit pictures and statues of Saddam Hussein. To the Iraqis, the greatest insult they could give him was to use their shoes, which cover the most unclean part of the body, to show their disdain for this leader.

Other gestures rarely used in the United States but that will be apparent when traveling to European countries include the fingertip kiss, nose thumb, eyelid pull, nose tap, and fingers cross. The meanings of these gestures, which were studied by nonverbal communication researcher Desmond Morris, vary somewhat based on the specific European country and the context in which they are used. The fingertip kiss, in which the tips of the thumb and fingers are kissed and quickly moved forward away from the face, is a sign of affection and may be used as a greeting in Sicily and Portugal. The fingertip kiss is not used often in Italy and the British Isles, but it is common in France, Germany, Greece, and Spain to signify praise. The nose thumb, formed by placing the thumb at the end of the nose and fingers forming a fanning motion, is an insult and is common in all European countries. The eyelid pull, formed by pulling down the lower lid of an open eye with the forefinger, signals boredom in Austria, but in many other European countries, including France, Germany, and Turkey, it signals alertness. The nose tap, in which one simply taps the side of the nose with the forefinger, is used to convey a request for confidentiality or secrecy in Sardinia and the British Isles. Tapping the front of the nose changes the

message to a request to mind one's own business in Austria, the Netherlands, and the British Isles. The fingers cross, formed by twisting the first and middle fingers around each other and lowering the remaining fingers, has several meanings, including a desire to break a friendship in Turkey. In other European countries, it can be used to signify that something is good or as a gesture of protection. This gesture should be used with caution because its meanings are quite varied.⁴

COLOR

Color, or chromatics, can have both positive and negative connotations; color can also affect a person's emotions and mood. Blue, for example, may have a positive connotation when used to represent the peace and tranquility associated with the blue of the sky or the sea. In other situations, blue may have a negative connotation when used to suggest sadness or depression. People say "I'm blue" to express melancholia. Black is another color that may be viewed in a positive or negative manner. Black is associated with sophistication and with high technology, but black may also be considered funereal and thus evoke feelings of sadness. White suggests purity and innocence; thus, white has been used successfully in marketing soaps as well as bridal gowns. In countries such as China, however, white is funereal.⁵

Colors may be associated with a particular nationality, such as the association of green with people of Ireland and red, white, and blue with people of the United States. Color is also associated with certain religions. Thus, companies doing business in the British Isles must understand that green is associated with the Catholic religion (however, the Pope's colors are white and yellow) and orange with Protestants to avoid unintentionally offending potential customers by using these two colors in their advertising and product packaging.⁶ In a ranking of consumer color preferences in selected countries, blue was ranked as the color preferred by most consumers in the United States, Austria, and China; it was ranked second (after white) in Brazil. Green and white were other preferred colors by consumers in these four countries located on different continents; the findings for these four countries were consistent with the other countries studied.⁷

Companies planning to market their products worldwide will want to become familiar with the special meanings of colors before entering a specific foreign market. A U.S. company marketing a product in China learned this lesson when it placed yellow markers on its product, signifying that the product had passed inspection. The company later learned that to the Chinese the yellow marker signified that the product was defective. Even after an explanation of the meaning of the yellow marker in the United

States, the Chinese were still uncomfortable accepting the shipment. Yellow, despite its positive associations with sunshine and happiness, may not be the best choice for marketing products internationally because of the negative connotations of the color, including cowardice. People in certain countries might be aware of other negative uses of yellow: Jewish people were forced by Nazis to wear yellow stars, and traitors' doors were streaked with yellow paint in France.⁸

Another U.S. manufacturer, which tried to sell white kitchen appliances in Hong Kong, learned that because white is associated with death, the Chinese would not buy white appliances. The company was successful, however, with the sale of almond colored appliances.⁹ Some firms have used color to attract the visual attention of consumers without giving much thought to the meanings conveyed by the colors. One such company was FedEx, who selected orange and purple for their logo, even though these colors clash and are rarely used together. Their apparent goal, immediate attention and recognition with every FedEx package delivered, was successful. Thus, sometimes it may be more important to create brand identity than to be concerned with the nonverbal message attached to the colors.¹⁰

An exhibitor at a trade show was giving green hats to those who visited the booth. When they tried to give a Chinese visitor one of their green hats, the gift was rejected. The Chinese visitor said, "I don't want to wear a green hat before I marry, and I don't want to wear one after I am married, either." The exhibitors later learned that the Chinese have an expression, "He wears a green hat," which implies infidelity by his wife or girlfriend. While green generally has a positive connotation for the Chinese, this is not true of green hats.¹¹

Some companies who tried to market their products in other countries were unsuccessful because they chose the wrong color either for the product or for its package. Green, although it has a positive connotation in France and Sweden because it is associated with cosmetics, has a negative connotation in countries with green jungles because of its association with disease. Red should be used with caution when marketing products internationally. Although a red circle on products sold in Latin American countries was successful, using red for packaging is not very popular in some Asian countries because it brings to mind the Japanese flag.¹² Likewise, use of red for a product or its package would not be recommended in South Korea because of the implied association with communism—an unwanted association by most South Koreans.¹³

Caution should also be exercised when using pictures of flowers because of the negative messages conveyed by either the type of flower or its color.

Yellow flowers, for example, are associated with infidelity in France and with death in Mexico. White lilies, used by people of Mexico to lift superstitious spells, are used for funerals in France. White flowers are associated with bad luck or death in many Asian countries; thus, white flowers should be avoided in advertising and packaging products.¹⁴

Color, in addition to its influence on international sales, is also important in selecting clothing. In most countries of the world, blue is viewed as a masculine color (except in Iran where blue is considered undesirable); however, in France and the United Kingdom, red is perceived as masculine. The use of color in clothing is covered in greater detail in Chapter 5, "Dress and Appearance."

EYE CONTACT

Eye contact, or oculosics, is given more emphasis in some cultures than in others. In the dominant U.S. culture, made up of people of European, Latin American, and Middle Eastern descent, that now represents almost three-fourths of the population, direct eye contact is important. U.S. people, however, do not appreciate a steady, unbroken gaze; they are uncomfortable with prolonged eye contact and may interpret this behavior as intrusive and aggressive. At the very minimum, they would consider staring at another person as rude. Staring between men and women in the United States may be interpreted as an indication of interest in the other person. Prolonged eye contact between U.S. men and women may be considered sexually suggestive. U.S. persons prefer that eye contact be maintained for a few seconds before one person glances away.

Nonverbal messages conveyed by eye contact in the U.S. dominant culture are attentiveness, respect, truthfulness, and self-confidence; messages conveyed by avoiding eye contact are insecurity, disrespect, inattentiveness, dishonesty, shyness, and lack of self-confidence. Failure to make eye contact in a culture that values it sends the message that the other person is insignificant and not worthy of recognition. Avoiding eye contact may also indicate arrogance and a condescending attitude.

Differences in the use of eye contact exist in U.S. cocultures. For example, African Americans make direct eye contact when they are speaking; however, they look away when listening, unlike a majority of people in the U.S. macroculture.¹⁵ Within the Native American coculture, the Hopi and Navajos are offended by direct eye contact. According to a Navajo myth, a person who stares is giving you the evil eye.

During an interview with Mu'ammarr Gadhafi, Barbara Walters did not understand why he would not look her directly in the eyes. She

found out later that Middle Eastern men show women respect by not looking them directly in the eyes.¹⁶

The duration of eye contact when two people are interacting varies with the culture. Greeks, for example, use more contact in public places and expect others to look at them as well. Failure to make eye contact makes people of Greece feel ignored. Middle Easterners, too, use a lot eye contact while both talking and listening. They do not like to talk to someone wearing dark glasses because they are unable to see the eyes. People from Sweden, on the other hand, do not give as much eye contact while conversing as other Europeans. They do, however, look at each other for longer periods of time.¹⁷

Unlike members of the dominant culture in the United States, people in many Asian countries are uncomfortable with direct eye contact. People of China and Japan, specifically, tend to look just below the chin during conversations. They feel that not looking into the other person's eyes during a conversation shows respect and would feel that continuing to look into the other person's eyes would be quite rude. Iraqis, likewise, avoid eye contact while conversing out of respect for their elders.

Prolonged eye contact, on the other hand, is typical of people from the Middle East, France, Germany, and some Latin American countries. (Certain Latin American and Caribbean cultures, however, show you respect by not having direct eye contact.) They associate this direct eye contact with interest, assertiveness, and self-confidence. Even in these countries, however, lengthy stares at a woman would be considered inappropriate.

In some cultures, eye contact is associated with status. Latin Americans, for example, avoid direct eye contact when conversing with their supervisors. In the United States, on the other hand, using direct eye contact with the supervisor is totally acceptable. Supervisors are more likely to hold eye contact for a longer period, however; subordinates will look away more often.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Facial expressions can reveal such emotions as anger, fear, happiness, sadness, disgust, and surprise. The meanings of these universal facial expressions are dependent on the culture, the situation, and the context in which the emotions are used, however. Although all cultures have a way of indicating emotions through facial expressions, the same expression does not have the same meaning in all cultures.

Tears, for example, are a clue to a person's emotions; but they do not always signal that a person is sad. Knowing whether a person who is crying

is happy or sad is difficult unless you know the culture and take into account the situation and the context. In Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures, you will see men crying in public; however, in the United States, white males would suppress such emotions, as would Japanese men. People of the United States cry to express sadness; crying is acceptable behavior at funerals, for example. In some cultures, however, crying is an expression of joy and is considered appropriate at such happy occasions as weddings.

In addition to tears, the eyes can reveal excitement by whether or not the pupils are dilated or constricted. The pupils widen when a person is interested or emotionally aroused and close when the person is displeased.

One of the most frequently used facial expressions is the smile. The meaning of the smile, though, varies with the culture. A smile can convey happiness or sadness; the smile may also serve as a mask to hide the person's true feelings. These false smiles may actually be a way of expressing contempt for the other person; the accompanying facial expression would involve tightening the corners of the lips. Experts have even offered guidelines for interpreting false smiles, such as a lack of involvement of the eye muscles when a person is pretending to be happy.

U.S. people associate the smile with happiness, but in other cultures the smile may have a different meaning. In some cultures, smiling (sometimes accompanied by a slight nod of the head) is used in conversations to acknowledge what the other person has said, even though the message was not really understood. The Japanese use the smile to convey a wide range of emotions, from happiness and agreement to sadness and disagreement. They are inclined to smile or laugh softly to conceal discomfort or embarrassment. Although Koreans rarely smile, people of Thailand smile a great deal. Koreans view people who smile a lot as shallow, whereas the Thais value laughter and a smiling attitude. In fact, Thailand is known as the Land of Smiles.

PARALANGUAGE

Paralanguage, a term related to nonverbal communication, refers to how something is said; it refers to the volume or rate of a person's speech that affects the meaning of the message. An increased volume of speech could mean the person is angry, whereas a lower volume indicates that a person is more sympathetic. An increased rate of speech could be an indication that the person is impatient or in a hurry, whereas a decreased rate could imply a reflective attitude.

Cultural differences in volume of speech are apparent when comparing Middle Easterners and Germans to Filipinos and the Japanese, for example.

Middle Easterners speak loudly because they associate volume with strength and sincerity; speaking softly would convey the impression of weakness. Germans, too, feel that using a commanding tone when speaking is important; speaking with authority conveys self-confidence. Filipinos, on the other hand, speak softly; they associate speaking softly with education and good manners. The Japanese also associate using a soft voice with good manners; speaking in a loud voice suggests a person lacks self-control.¹⁸

Cultural differences in rate of speech are apparent when listening to the speaking rates of Italians and Arabs, which are much faster than speaking rates of U.S. Americans. In addition to cultural differences in speech rate, regional differences exist within the United States. People who live in the northern United States speak much faster than those who live in the southern United States. This difference in speech rate may cause problems with understanding the intended message; this appears to be especially true when people who speak slowly try to understand people who speak rapidly.¹⁹

Another aspect of paralinguistics is accent. Accent is very important to the British; they are often able to determine educational background by the person's accent. A person's accent may be a factor in hiring decisions, especially in some sections of the United States. In one study, people who spoke what is often referred to as Standard English were found in supervisory positions more often than were persons who spoke with a pronounced accent.²⁰

Paralinguistics provides useful information about a person's emotional state as well as information on a person's cultural, regional, and educational background. This information, when combined with spoken words, can provide insight into understanding the intended meaning of a message.

POSTURE

Your posture, whether standing, sitting, or walking, can convey such non-verbal messages as agreement/disagreement, confidence/lack of confidence, interest/disinterest, and high/low status. People who share the same point of view will often reveal this by assuming similar postures, whereas those who disagree will assume different postures. Posture is associated with confidence or a lack of it. Self-confident people sit and stand erectly and move easily and with assurance, whereas those who lack confidence tend to walk with stooped shoulders and move cautiously. Posture can reveal interest or disinterest in what another person is saying: Leaning toward the person shows interest; leaning back in the chair or turning away from the person when standing indicates disinterest. Status is also a consideration; people are more likely to face a person of higher status during a conversation than if the person were of lower status.

Posture when we are seated can send unintentional messages. The seated posture of people of the United States is quite relaxed. U.S. men cross their legs by placing the ankle on the knee, a posture seen as offensive by Europeans. Asians and Middle Easterners would also view this crossing of the legs as inappropriate. Correct posture when seated is especially important in the Arab world. Crossing the legs would reveal the sole of the shoe and involve pointing the toe at someone. Because the foot is the lowest part of the body and considered unclean, these behaviors would be viewed as offensive. In assuming a relaxed seated posture, U.S. persons, especially men, sometimes stretch their legs in front of them; Iranians would consider this posture inappropriate. Because seated posture is very important to the Japanese, do not slouch when conversing with them and place both feet on the floor.

Perhaps the best advice when interacting with persons of other cultures is to follow their lead. Watch how they stand and sit and mirror the posture they assume.

SILENCE

Silence is one nonverbal communication form that is interpreted very differently around the world. Silence allows time to think, express emotions, consider a response, or think about something other than the subject at hand. Silence, much like smell and touch, transcends verbal communication. People of the U.S. dominant culture are uncomfortable with silence. They use it to show disapproval or, in some cases, to collect their thoughts before saying something they might later regret. U.S. persons fill the silence with comments on the weather or anything else to avoid remaining silent. In other cultures, particularly in Asia and Scandinavia, silence is considered an integral part of communication. The Japanese would consider someone who had no periods of silence as someone who is giving very little thought to what they are saying; they further believe that what the person is saying may lack focus. When the Japanese use silence after a presentation, for example, they are showing respect for what has been said. The Japanese have been given price concessions by U.S. businesspeople simply because the U.S. negotiators interpreted Japanese silence incorrectly, thinking it meant that they did not like the deal. The people of Finland actually buy books on how to develop everyday chitchat so that they can fit in better when dealing with people from countries that use small talk to fill periods of silence, such as in the United States. Middle Easterners, on the other hand, do not require periods of silence.

Because you may encounter silence used in many different ways in different cultures, you need to give some thought to what is being communicated to you via the silence. Is the person conveying respect or is the person simply confused or giving further thought to what has been said? Perhaps the person is really saying no or does not understand your message. The hardest part will be to step back, relax, and remember that silence can be positive.

Countries that are considered low-context cultures, such as the United States, are uncomfortable with silence. Low-context cultures consider silence as an indication that something is wrong. High-context cultures, such as Japan and Germany, are very comfortable with silence. To people in high-context cultures, silence is used to dissect what was said and to truly understand the other person's comments.

To understand different cultures' views of silence, consider their proverbs or adages:

- China: "Believe not others' tales, others will lead thee far astray."
 - Japan: "It is the duck that squawks that gets shot."
 - U.S.: "The squeaky wheel gets the grease."
 - Native American: "It does not require many words to speak the truth."
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SMELL

Smell, or olfactics, is part of nonverbal communication. People will react positively or negatively to other people based on the way they smell. A person's smell remains in another person's memory long after he or she has left the room. You smell like you do because of hygiene, what you eat (particularly spices), and the scents you apply to your skin. If you are from the United States, you probably find body odors, bad breath, perspiration, or too much cologne to be offensive. In many countries, however, such as France, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, you will find that the men wear heavier fragrances than women. As clean as U.S. people think they are, many cultures find their smell offensive. Because people of the United States eat a lot more meat than people in many other countries, their body odor is different from that of people from countries in which more vegetables and fish are consumed. Japanese and Filipinos are raised to be very conscious of different odors and often complain about the way U.S. Americans smell. Although U.S. persons tend to be uncomfortable with natural smells, Middle Easterners and Filipinos believe being able to smell a friend's breath is pleasing. Not knowing how a culture perceives odors and how you are expected to react to the odors has affected many business transactions.

A medical doctor from Saudi Arabia was completing an internship in a hospital in the southern United States. Problems arose when patients refused to have the Saudi doctor examine them. Interviews with patients revealed two problems: he “smelled bad” and he breathed on the patients. The doctor’s orientation had apparently failed to include the incongruence between Arabic and U.S. American perceptions of smell.

To be accepted by persons of other cultures, you will want to adopt the hygiene practices of the country you are visiting or in which you are conducting business as much as possible.

SPACE AND TOUCH

Space, known as proxemics, and touch, or haptics, are two very important nonverbal communication modes you will want to investigate about the country to which you plan to travel. Touch is one of the earliest forms of nonverbal communication we learn. Touch has been shown to be so important that children denied touch develop biochemical or emotional problems. As we mature, our culture teaches us what types of touch are appropriate and the proper space expected in various situations.

In the African American coculture, people of both genders touch each other when greeting much more than do people of the dominant U.S. culture. Cultures that believe in restraining their emotions are less likely to touch than cultures that encourage affection. Men and men or women and women kiss each other when meeting in Eastern Europe, Spain, Italy, Portugal, or the Middle East. This is not a typical behavior of persons of the dominant U.S. culture.

A U.S. firm recently acquired a plant in Italy. One of the things Italian men are known for is squeezing females’ derrieres to indicate to the lady that she is attractive. The practice is very accepted in Italy. The U.S. firm brought some of the Italians to the United States for training. When a young lady’s derriere was squeezed, she was not happy about the situation. When they explained to the man that in the work situation this is considered sexual harassment, he was in disbelief that the young woman would not like the attention. The company men even joked about making an Armani three-second rule for touching a female working companion because otherwise you would be offending the lady.

The amount of space one considers personal differs significantly from one culture to another. When someone invades our space, we may back up, stand still (but get a bit uneasy), or react strongly. Space is closely tied to touch and our desire either to be touched or not to be touched as well as our desire to smell or not to smell someone with whom we are conversing.

The number of feet or inches between people when they are having a conversation changes dramatically from one culture to another. In the United States you would stand less than 18 inches from a close friend or someone with whom you are intimate. If you are giving instructions to someone in an office, you would probably stand from 18 inches to 4 feet, depending on the type of activity: Viewing the same report or computer screen, for example, would necessitate being closer to another person than would being seated at a conference table. Businesspeople enter the 18-inch space only briefly, such as when they shake hands. In social situations, people of the United States stand 4 to 12 feet apart, and this is generally an appropriate amount of space for impersonal business interactions. The cultural attitude toward space is reflected in our need for privacy. Therefore, you will find that people of cultures that value privacy also usually want more space between themselves and others with whom they are communicating.

A psychology professor at a southern university gave his students an assignment to test the use of space in such crowded places as an elevator. Students reported the usual U.S. behaviors of facing the front and watching the illuminated floor indicator, assuming the Fig Leaf Position (hands/purses/briefcases hanging down in front of the body), and positioning themselves in the corners or against the elevator walls. Then the professor added another assignment: students were to break the rules and get on the elevator, stand at the front facing the other occupants, and jump backward off the elevator just before the door closed. One of the elevator occupants was heard to whisper, "Call 911; we've got a real weirdo here."²¹

You will find that U.S. people tend to use more space than Greeks, Latin Americans, or Middle Easterners. If you find yourself backing away from a person while you are having a conversation, they are probably accustomed to standing much closer to someone with whom they are interacting. What you will inadvertently do is step back until you are comfortable with the space between you or back up until you reach an object and can go no farther. Cultures in which people stand even farther apart than U.S. people are the Japanese and Southeast Asian cultures.

Standing close to someone in the United States may give the impression that you are upset, pushy, overbearing, or that you are making sexual advances. These types of unwelcome, negative positions should be avoided in the United States. In other cultures in which people prefer to stand close, you need to understand that they are only doing what is normal in their culture. U.S. Americans who are older or of higher status may touch persons who are younger or of lower status.

Cultures that reveal how they feel through touch and close proximity to the individuals with whom they are communicating often feel that people who are not effective in their communication are holding back information and not revealing everything, that they are tense rather than relaxed, and that they are not as trustworthy. If you are to be a good communicator interculturally, you must adapt your communication style as much as possible to the culture with which you are dealing. If you are dealing with a culture that seems unresponsive, cold, emotionless, or disinterested, remember they may be showing you respect. Likewise, if you are dealing with a culture that is very emotionally demonstrative, you need to learn about their history, culture, and way of life so that you can participate in their enthusiasm for developing friendships so that you will be seen as a good working business partner. The two extremes are seen as either cold-hearted or out of control.

During an intercultural training session at a Japanese plant located in the United States, one Mr. Suzuki asked the instructor what it means when someone pats you on the back. The instructor explained that means you have done a good job. All the men started to laugh. In Japan it means you have not done a good job, that you are in trouble with the boss. At the end of the meeting, everyone went out of the room patting each other on the back.

The way in which businesspeople arrange desks, chairs, or conference table seating also communicates through the use of space. When you are conversing with U.S. people, they generally prefer to be face-to-face. Although you might prefer chairs arranged at right angles to one another, the Chinese, for example, prefer the side-by-side arrangement. They may prefer this arrangement because it allows them to avoid direct eye contact, which is one of the ways they show respect. You also convey authority and position by your selection and arrangement of furniture. A large wooden desk and desk chairs with arms convey power and authority. Placing the desk and chair in front of a window or an arrangement of pictures on the wall creates a throne-like effect that adds to the sense of power.

You also send nonverbal messages with aspects of office arrangement. Although in the United States private offices and windows in offices give you more status than offices that are inside without windows, this is not true in all countries. In France, top-level executives locate themselves in the middle of an office area with subordinates around them. The Japanese are all at desks in neat rows regardless of their position. In addition to office size, in the United States higher-ranking executives have their territory better protected than do lower-status employees; doors and secretaries are often used as barriers to access.

Office location within a building also conveys power and status or an absence of power and status. In both the United States and Germany, top-level executives generally occupy the higher floors of an office building.

NONVERBAL LEAKAGE

Leakage occurs when people try unsuccessfully to control their nonverbal behavior and to conceal an attitude or information. Nonverbal leakage represents a person's actual feelings that lie beneath the social mask. Because people try harder to control facial expressions, and because facial expressions are easier to control, a lot of the nonverbal leakage occurs in the feet and legs as well as in the arms and hands. For example, people who are trying to deceive other people will often cross and uncross their legs or shuffle their feet. They will also use the hand shrug, which involves rotating the hands and exposing the palms. This gesture conveys helplessness; people using the hand shrug are attempting to elicit sympathy from others by implying that they are unable to help themselves. In addition, certain gestures occur more frequently with people engaging in deception. These gestures include gripping arm rests, tapping fingers on a table, licking the lips, and touching an eye or the side of the nose.²²

In one study convicted muggers, who were interviewed separately, were shown videotapes of pedestrians in public places; they were able to identify the same people as potential victims. By examining nonverbal leakage, the muggers were able to spot behaviors that communicated the vulnerability of the pedestrians. Muggers, who must act quickly, become experts at nonverbal leakage.²³

People who are untruthful engage in other nonverbal behaviors that may be obvious to people who have studied nonverbal communication. People who lie tend to avoid getting close to another person; they also tend to perspire, gulp, and play with a pencil or their glasses. Changes in pupil

size as well as changes in skin color are examples of physiological changes that are not within a person's conscious control.²⁴

In some cases, a person's body language contradicts what the person says. In these cases, body language is a better indicator of the truth than the verbal message.²⁵

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The following countries are those with which the United States conducts a majority of its international business as well as those countries that are the destinations most frequently visited by U.S. travelers according to figures provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries. Although Iraq and Saudi Arabia do not fall into either category, these countries are included as examples of Middle Eastern countries.

Canada

- Most gestures used by U.S. persons are recognized in Canada.
- The beckoning signal, however, is a bit different: The palm of the hand is faced inward with the fingers up; the fingers are used to motion toward the body. This gesture, however, is not used to summon a waiter. To beckon a restaurant server, simply raise the hand above the head. Pointing with a single finger is rude. French Canadians tend to gesture more during conversations than do other Canadians.
- Direct eye contact is expected during greetings and when shaking hands as well as during conversations.
- Appropriate seated posture for men includes sitting with legs crossed at the knees or ankles or with an ankle crossed on the opposite knee.
- Canadians prefer to keep a distance of about a half-meter (1.7 feet) when interacting. Atlantic Canadians prefer more personal distance when conversing than do U.S. persons. Avoid casual touching; touching between close friends and relatives, though, is customary.
- The use of silence, smell, space, and touch is very similar to the United States.

China

- The thumbs-up gesture means everything is fine.
- Use the entire hand, rather than a single finger, to point.
- Use your downward facing palm with the fingers making a scratching motion to beckon.
- Direct eye contact should be avoided in public.

- Smiling is not common during introductions. In fact, the Chinese typically do not reveal their emotions by their facial expressions.
- Posture is important; sit erectly and avoid placing your feet on furniture.
- Silence is highly valued; it is equated with being polite and contemplative. Avoid interrupting someone during conversations.
- Standing close while conversing is common; the Chinese are accustomed to crowded environments.
- Body contact with strangers is inappropriate, as China is not a touch-oriented culture. Do not pat anyone on the head, back, or shoulder. Even placing your hand or arm on the back of a chair in which a Chinese person is sitting is inappropriate. Embracing and kissing are not common greeting behaviors.

England

- Gestures are kept to a minimum; the British do not rely on gestures to add meaning to the spoken message.
- Eye contact is light; it is appropriate when greeting someone or when shaking hands, but prolonged eye contact and staring are not welcomed.
- Smiling when passing a stranger on the street is appropriate when accompanied by eye contact and a greeting such as “Good morning.”
- Avoid showing emotions, including excessive enthusiasm or disappointment. Displaying emotions is not characteristic of the British.
- Do not stand too close while conversing; respecting another person’s personal space (which is greater than that preferred in the United States) is expected.
- Touching is uncommon; however, it is acceptable for women to be kissed on the cheek by their male and female friends.

France

- The U.S. OK gesture means “worthless” or “good for nothing”; the French use the thumbs-up sign to signify that everything is going well.
- The V for victory gesture may be done with palm in or out in France; the meaning is the same.
- Avoid using only the index finger for pointing; use the entire hand.
- Avoid snapping your fingers to get someone’s attention; this is considered offensive.
- Do not stand with folded arms, as this is viewed as arrogant.
- To beckon a restaurant server, raise your hand slightly or try to make eye contact and nod your head, accompanied by “*s’il vous plaît*” (if you please).

- Eye contact in France is quite intense; it exceeds the level of comfort of U.S. persons. Visitors to France should remember that this behavior is typical of the French and should not consider it rude. Avoiding direct eye contact in business or social situations would be viewed negatively.
- Smiling when passing people on the street is not common.
- Never chew gum in public.
- Posture while seated is important; sit erectly, either with knees together or with legs crossed at the ankle. Do not slouch, sit with legs apart, or sit with legs stretched in front of you.

Germany

- It is rude to have your hands in your pockets when talking with someone.
- Never point your index finger to your head.
- To wish someone good luck, squeeze your thumb by folding the fingers around the thumb.
- Direct eye contact is a sign of sincerity to the Germans.
- Germans rarely smile during business sessions with colleagues or visitors.
- Do not chew gum in public.
- Cross your legs at the knees.
- An upright posture is important to Germans; never place your feet on furniture.
- Leave the furniture as it is placed in an office; to move a chair is insulting.
- Stand farther from a German when talking than when talking to a U.S. businessperson.
- Privacy is important to Germans; doors are kept closed.

Iraq

- The left hand should not be used to eat, to hand something to someone, or to gesture.
- Never point the bottom of your feet toward someone.
- Direct eye contact is considered appropriate; however, young people will not maintain eye contact with their elders as a sign of respect nor will men and women maintain eye contact.
- Very demonstrative facial expressions are used to connote emotions.
- Touch members of the opposite gender only if they are related to you.
- Iraqis like to stand close, use touch, and body language in their conversation.
- Iraqi men often walk hand in hand. This is a sign of friendship only.

Italy

- Italians use more gestures than any other European country and are too numerous to list. Travelers may see Italian men kissing the fingertips, a gesture that signifies beauty or excellence; this gesture may be used to indicate that a woman is beautiful or that the food is excellent.
- Use of the “hand purse,” fingertips together to signify a question, should be avoided; its use is confined to use by Italians.
- Gestures to avoid include putting your hand on your stomach (dislike of the person), pointing your index and little finger at a person (a wish for bad luck), and thumbing your nose (obscene).
- Rubbing the thumb and fingers together quickly means money.
- Eye contact is expected when shaking hands and should be maintained during conversations; failure to give eye contact suggests you have something to hide.
- Italians prefer to stand closer together than U.S. persons are comfortable with; avoid backing away, as this is viewed as an insult.
- Touching between Italian men is common; in fact, male friends often embrace. Italian women do not usually touch other women, however. Seeing people of the same gender walk down the street arm in arm is common.

Japan

- Wave all your fingers with the palm facing downward to get someone’s attention.
- When referring to yourself, use your index finger and point to your nose.
- Gum chewing is not allowed in public.
- Indirect eye contact is used to show respect.
- Facial expressions are minimal; yawning in public is discourteous.
- The smile has numerous meanings, including pleasure, displeasure, and embarrassment.
- Politeness is a must, as the Japanese will seldom say “no.”
- Sit straight with both feet on the floor. Men may cross their legs at the knees or the ankles.
- Young girls often walk hand in hand.
- Japanese use silence as respect, to cover embarrassment, to convey truthfulness, and to show defiance. The meaning depends on the situation and other events.
- Male-female touching in public is considered inappropriate.
- Refrain from backslapping and other forms of touching.

Mexico

- Mexicans use thumbs-up for approval, but thumbs-down should be avoided because it is considered vulgar.
- Placing your hands on your hips or in your pockets while standing and talking with someone would indicate that you are angry.
- Mexicans use their hands to gesture and exhibit many different facial expressions when conversing.
- Direct eye contact is used except for Native Mexicans who tend to use indirect eye contact.
- Mexicans like to stand close and like to touch the person with whom they are conversing; pulling away or backing up would be considered unfriendly.

Netherlands

- Tapping the forehead or pretending to grab an imaginary fly suggests that the person is crazy.
- Avoid standing too close during conversations.
- Avoid touching or hugging in public.
- Maintain eye contact while conversing.
- Placing the hand beneath the chin and stroking an imaginary long beard means that the story being told is old.

Saudi Arabia

- A finger or hand to point or beckon another person is not used.
- Avoid using your left hand to pass or receive items.
- Direct eye contact is considered sincere, except between genders, when males will use indirect eye contact to show respect.
- Do not point your feet at someone else.
- Cross your legs at the knees only.
- Stand close to your own gender when conducting business; however, you should keep your distance and not touch the opposite gender.
- To signal “no,” tip the head back and click the tongue; to indicate “yes,” simply nod your head up and down.

South Korea

- Avoid placing feet on chairs or desks.
- Wave the fingers together, palm down, to beckon someone; avoid beckoning with the index finger.

- Pass items with both hands.
- Maintain eye contact during conversations.
- Speak in a low voice; avoid loud laughter or speech.
- Avoid touching older people and persons of the opposite gender.
- Expect to see two people of the same gender holding hands while walking in public; it signifies friendship only.

Taiwan

- Use an open hand when pointing; do not use the index finger.
- Avoid winking; this is considered rude.
- Maintain a minimum of eye contact.
- Maintain a calm demeanor; avoid showing emotions.
- Pass items with both hands.
- Avoid placing an arm around another person's shoulder.
- Avoid loud behavior; avoid losing your temper.
- Do not place feet on a desk or table; do not use feet to touch or move objects.