How to perfect your body language for online presentations

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As mobile work styles become increasingly popular, odds are you're going to wind up hosting a video conference or webinar sometime in the near future. With a limited amount of screen real estate to work with and varying device screen sizes that your audience will be using, it's more important than ever that you make a great first impression. So, are you ready for your close up?

It is crucial for you as the speaker to be able to establish confidence and credibility with your audience in order to hold their attention, especially on a video conference. Think about it—they don't even have to worry about looking rude if they want to leave; if they don't like you, they can just turn off their device. Luckily we've compiled 10 tips for simple and powerful body language improvement that you can follow to help build trust nonverbally with your audience.

Watch the full webinar on The Power of Body Language from body language expert Tonya Reiman.

Tip #1: Check your body language (before you wreck your body language).

Are you sitting slouched over? Are your arms crossed? Do you appear approachable? Those are all questions that your audience asks themselves when they see you for the first time. They are looking for subtle physical cues to inform how they are going to listen to you or interact with you. If you open up your posture and appear relaxed and friendly, your audience will subconsciously mirror that behavior and be more accepting of what you're going to say.

Tip #2: Create positive eye contact, not the creepy kind.

We all know that there's a clear distinction between "creepy" eye contact and positive eye contact. Your audience is going to be staring directly at your face for an extended period of time, so make sure that your expression isn't too intense and try to smile with your eyes, or just relax your face and pretend like you're talking with a friend. This will put your audience at ease, and they will find themselves smiling back at their screens. Like yawning, it's contagious.

Tip #3: Use microexpressions to add animation.

No need to maintain a blank poker face when talking on a video conference or webinar. In fact, your audience will probably appreciate you having animation as it shows them that you are passionate about your topic or empathetic to their problem.

That being said, before you turn on your webcam to hundreds of (hopefully) intent listeners, take a few minutes and preview yourself in the video viewer. Do you raise your eyebrows when you're surprised? Do you furrow your brows when you're confused? Being aware of these microexpressions can help you shape your audience's initial impressions of you while projecting self-confidence on camera.

Tip #4: Decide what to wear and what not to wear.

It's difficult to listen to someone or even take them seriously when they are wearing a sloppily tied bow tie or ridiculously tight clothes. You find yourself distracted and focusing on the person's appearance instead of their message. The same goes for your audience. Make sure you have selected an outfit that is culturally appropriate for the audience you are addressing. Try wearing form fitting, professional clothes that make you feel good and colors that you know will compliment your overall appearance on camera. (Red is the hardest color to produce on video.) That small level of self-comfort will translate on screen in a big way to your audience. The more at ease you look, the more confident you will appear to people—and that goes a long way towards building credibility.

Tip #5: Know your frame game.

A typical phrase used in television is to ask "What's my frame?" It's a way for an actor or director to understand how the camera is going to be framing up their shot. As you are your own active cameraman, you're going to have to take the responsibility to ask "What's my frame?" before your audience even sees you.

Are you in a professional setting where you feel relaxed and ready to talk? Is your chair at the optimum height for your audience to see you? Is your webcam pointed directly at you? Is the lighting around you unflattering? These are all small things that you can adjust so that you feel ready and don't have any last-minute scrambling, which your audience might interpret as you not being ready or not caring about their time.

Tip #6: Keep your gestures within view.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who liked to talk with their hands? While it can be a fun way to illustrate your point (or a not-so-fun way to put out an eye), it can also be a giant distraction for your audience.

In a video conference, you don't have a lot of space for gestures, and wild or large hand movements that may work in live environments might make you look erratic or completely detract from what you are trying to say. Keep your movements controlled and on-camera at all times. Be assertive with your movements without being harsh and try to keep the movement as natural as possible. Looking crazy or nervous on a video conference using fast or unnatural gestures could be interpreted by your audience as bring unprepared.

Tip #7: Sit up straight, like you've always been told.

Do you ever find yourself hunching over to look in to your camera? Well, your audience sees that too, only it looks like extreme slouching to them. Good posture is a subtle nonverbal cue that your audience will pick up on as an indication of poise. The more open and erect your posture on camera, the more confidence you are going to project to those watching you. If you look assured of yourself and your presence on camera, your audience will trust that you know what you're talking about.

Tip #8: Know your stuff.

This seems like a no-brainer, but it's worth repeating if it will help you build credibility and lead to a stellar first impression with your audience. Have you

rehearsed your presentation? Do you know your topic inside and out? Do you know who you are talking to? Are there any cultural nuances that you should be aware of with your audience?

Asking yourself these types of questions beforehand can help you avoid embarrassing pitfalls which could annoy or even offend your audience. Knowing your subject matter will also allow you keep your head up instead of buried in notes. That will give the impression of self-assuredness and intelligence—two very good things when trying to build trust and make connections with new people on a video conference.

Tip #9: Vary your vocal pitch (but not too much).

The inflection of your voice, even before you get into the meat of your presentation, has the power to influence the way others will see you. Before you start your video conference, allow your voice to relax into its optimal pitch. Do some vocal warms ups, practice how you are going to say hello or even just practice the first few lines of your pitch. This will help you maintain a more even and relaxed tone when meeting your audience for the first time. Try to keep your vocal inflection varied but not all over the place. It will keep your tone interesting. Sounding confident and prepared will help establish you as a thought leader in your audience's eyes.

Tip #10: Get familiar with your good side.

It sounds funny, but do you know your "good side?" Being aware of your strengths will go a long way to establishing credibility with an audience who are going to be making a snap judgment of you based on what they see on a webcam. The audience is literally taking you at face value when they first meet you on a video conference. Understanding how you look on camera and what angles work for you is an easy way to show your audience that you know what you're doing and that they should listen to you.

Lights, camera, your turn!

Closing that big deal or presenting to an executive board can be stressful, but using these simple yet effective tips can help you to exude self-confidence and build credibility with your audience. For more great examples of how to harness the power of body language and ensure a positive first impression every time, watch *The Power of Body Language* webinar from body language expert Tonya Reiman.

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