**NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST**

Like its verbal counterpart, nonverbal communication is largely a learned, or culturally transmitted, phenomenon. Although some convincing evidence shows that certain limited aspects of nonverbal communication are universal (for example, the expression of emotions through smiles, frowns, or eyebrow flashes), the great majority of nonverbal cues, and the meanings attached to them, vary from culture to culture.

Thoroughly observe the following :

* **Hand gestures (e.g. infographic about Hand gestures)**
* **Space usage (proxemics) : ,** most middle-class Americans choose for normal conversations a distance of approximately twenty inches, with minor variations depending on sex and level of intimacy. For certain cultural groups in South America and the Caribbean, the normal conversational distance is in the range of fourteen to fifteen inches. And for certain cultures in the Middle East and South America, that distance is as small as nine to ten inches. These appreciable differences should make it painfully obvious just how important an understanding of proxemic variables is to effective intercultural communication. To stand twenty inches from a Saudi Arabian, although normal for an American, communicates reserve, unfriendliness, and a sense of superiority. Yet when the Saudi moves closer, to establish what for him or her is a more comfortable conversational distance, the typical American interprets it as pushy or aggressive.
* **Color symbolism** (e.g. color symbolism job aid)
* **Artifacts** (jewelry, fly whisks, lapel pins, the role of status symbols)
* **Clothing (physical appearance in general)**
* **Silence (e.g. article The Role of Silence in Different Cultures)**
* **Body Language and Smiles.** People smile for different reasons. Does a weak smile mean, “Yes, I agree,” or does it mean, “I have listened to you and don’t want to openly disagree”? Managers who come from Direct Communication cultures are often confused, not knowing how to interpret the critical subtle messages from people who are Indirect. Don’t assume that what a smile or a nod or any other familiar gesture means in your own culture can automatically be interpreted to another. Sometimes it does, but often it doesn't. Learn not to misinterpret a smile, which can mean anything from "I agree" to "I understand” to “I do not agree but cannot tell you now.” A smile can also mask the discomfort of someone conveying bad news. In many Middle Eastern societies, common ways to denote negative responses include raising the eyebrows with the head tilted back, clicking the tongue to make a "tsk" sound, and repeatedly moving the forefinger from right to left. Shaking the head from side to side often indicates a lack of understanding rather than disagreement.
* **Eye Contact.** As with body and facial gestures, eye contact is culturally bound. In many Latin American cultures, eye contact with those in superior positions is generally an indirect way to demonstrate proper respect. However, intense eye contact might be misinterpreted as aggression. Some Asian cultures consider it disrespectful to stare into another individual’s eyes, particularly those of someone who is senior in rank. Some might take prolonged eye contact as a challenge, while brief eye contact can communicate interest in the other person. In China and Japan, avoiding eye contact also allows a sense of privacy. Many Japanese will even close their eyes during meetings or while riding in an elevator—but do not mistake this for falling asleep! At the other end of the spectrum, in many Middle Eastern countries, eye contact is critical while conversing. If you glance away it might be taken as lack of interest in the discussion or even lack of respect towards the speaker. And, in many Direct Communication Western cultures, eye contact is crucial and represents sincerity, strong intent, and engagement.
* **Personal Space and Touching.** The use of touching, the distance people stand from each other when they speak, and even where people are positioned around a conference table are indicators you should observe carefully. In some cultures, touching is appropriate during almost any kind of communication; in others it is offensive and is reserved for close friends and family. In many Latin cultures, it is not uncommon to use big gestures, to touch shoulders or hold the arm of the other person while conversing to emphasize a point or show involvement and camaraderie. If you withdraw from these gestures, someone might see it as an insult. Some cultures are high-touch cultures, and others are low-touch cultures : Mediterranean cultures, Arabs, Jews, and eastern Europeans are high-touch cultures, whereas the English, Germans, northern Europeans, and many Asian cultures are lowtouch cultures.

Based on several gender related studies, strong evidence indicates that women are better able to read nonverbal cues than are men.

**Check your own non-verbal communication skills by doing the PONS (Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity) test**