

## Gestures: Get Moving!

**Let go of your stiff death grip on the lectern and learn how to make your speeches interesting through body language.**

The human body contains more than 700 muscles, but few of those are used by speakers – except when using their arms and fingers in a life-preserving clutch of lecterns and laser pointers or frenetically clicking on PowerPoint slides. Speakers tend to focus most of their efforts in search of the perfect word to illustrate their precious points, despite overwhelming evidence proving that, in fact, our bodies speak louder than words.

Your effectiveness as a speaker is directly related to your ability to invoke emotion and interest through the use of non-verbal communication. Your listeners judge you and your message based on what they see as well as what they hear. In public speaking, your body can be an effective tool for adding emphasis and clarity to your words. It's also your most powerful instrument for convincing an audience of your sincerity, earnestness and enthusiasm. Whether your purpose is to inform, persuade, entertain, motivate or inspire, your body language and the personality you project must be appropriate to what you say. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." So be sure your appearance, posture and attire is appropriate as well.

Here's how you can incorporate appropriate body language into your speeches:

- **Start with eye contact.** Being prepared – having control of your message – is a prerequisite for being able to project and establish a bond with the audience. Don't just pass your gaze throughout the room; try to focus on individual listeners and create a bond with them by looking them directly in the eyes for five to 10 seconds.
- **Smile!**
- **Express emotion with your facial muscles.** For inspiration, take a look at the *The Human Face*, a BBC documentary narrated by John Cleese of Monty Python fame, now available on DVD.
- **Avoid distracting mannerisms** – have a friend watch as you practice and look for nervous expressions such as fidgeting, twitching, lip biting, key jingling, hands in pockets or behind the back.
- **Telling a story?** Highlight the action verbs and look for ways to act out one or more parts. Speaking about marathon running? Run a few steps.
- **Stay true to your personality.** Don't copy gestures from a book or other speaker, but respond naturally to what you feel and say.
- **Make gestures convincing.** Every hand gesture should be total body movement that starts from the shoulder – never from the elbow. Half-hearted gestures look artificial.
- **Vary your speaking position by moving from one spot on the stage to another.** For example, walk to the other side of the stage as you move to a new topic or move toward the audience as you ask a question.