

Meeting with Clients: Setup and Non-Verbal Communication

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Introduction

How does the client make their first impression of you, as a consultant?

There is a lot more to communication than the words you speak.

A lot can be communicated before we say anything.

- attitude
- interest
- respect
- competence
- dominance

Attitude Counts

Recall that client satisfaction depends on your

- attitude
- responsiveness
- pleasantness

Part of this is non-verbal, and part is style of communication.
This lecture follows Chapter 3 of Derr (2000).

When strangers meet

We need get to get to know each other well enough that we are comfortable with each other's behavior.

Additional problems when from different cultures.

When dissimilar or uncomfortable, participants

- Seek less information from each other.
- Disclose less information about themselves.
- Have shorter meetings.

Establishing comfort is important.

First Contact

First impressions count! They establish tone.

Watch Dr. Derr and Mr. Johnson meet in Video 1.

What did we see?

Tell me about:

- Physical layout of the room.
- Attention.
- The greeting.
- Eye contact.
- Physical contact.
- Small talk.
- Client comfort.

Improved Version

Watch improved version (video 3)

What changed? How is this better?

Physical layout

- Don't speak across the desk (implies superiority).
- Use open setting or
- Seated together around a round table (just like Camelot).
- Piled high desk and/or chairs puts clients off. (Ooops)

Peek in Prof. Weisberg's office for a good setting.

The greeting

If you expect greeting A and get greeting B, things may go rapidly downhill.

- Pay attention to client.
- Make eye contact.
- Move towards the client in greeting.
- Speak to the client.
- Smile.
- Shake hands.
- Usher the client in.

Here be dragons!

I said shake hands, but some cultures

- Bow.
- Bring hands together.
- Slap hands.
- Kiss cheeks.
- Rub noses.

Greeting is culture-specific and you need to make allowances.
Eg, Muslim women may not shake hands with males.

Non-verbal communication

Watch video 2b, with no sound

OK, this is clearly the bad consultant. What made it bad?

Second try

Now let's let Dr. Derr have another chance.

Watch video (4b) and see if you can tell the difference.
What changed?

Eye contact

Three bears problem:

- Too little may give impression of passiveness, submission, discomfort, or disinterest.
- Too much may give impression of dominance, aggression, or altogether too much interest.
- Need to get it just right.

But just right is a personal/cultural trait, so you need to pay attention to how your client reacts.

Personal space

How big is your bubble? Everyone's is different.

Getting too close can seem invasive, aggressive, threatening.

Keeping too far seems inattentive, disinterested, or angry.

Touch can be friendly and reassuring, or aggressive and too friendly.

You have to "feel your way" (groan!) through this issue.

Everyone has a different idea of space.

Technical issues will suffer until this is settled.

Facial expression

- Smile.
- Be responsive.
- Stay awake.

Facial expression can also give you a clue about how your client is doing.

Posture

This is again culturally dependent!

Leaning slightly forward (open posture) shows interest.

Leaning back, crossing arms, crossing legs (closed posture) shows disinterest or defensiveness.

Closed clients

If your client is taking a closed posture, try to figure out what why he or she is uncomfortable. It could be almost anything:

- Are you invading her space?
- Did you say something he didn't understand?
- Are negotiations on budget going badly?
- ...

Try to identify problems early and correct them early.

Non-verbal messages

Non-verbal messages are important

Perhaps as important as anything you say.

Trouble if verbal cues don't match non-verbal cues — client is more likely to believe the non-verbal cues.

- Posture
- Gestures
- Eye contact
- Facial expression.

Show that you are interested, listening, understanding.

Cultural discussion

- How late can you be for the first meeting without offending the client?
- How late can the client be for the first meeting without offending you?
- How should you greet the client?
- How far apart should you and your client sit?

Cultural discussion

- How much eye contact should you make with the client?
- How much eye contact should the client make with you?
- How do you indicate agreement or understanding with what the client has said?
- What form of touching is acceptable (if any)?

Summary

- Non-verbal communication is very important.
- Non-verbal communication is culture-specific.
- Use non-verbal communication to improve interaction with your client.