



More on Being Understood.

Surprise! Words don't always mean that much!

We've all had it happen to us — we say one thing and the person hears another. Before we know it, we're each talking about something different — and it usually takes a moment or three before we realize. This is no big deal with friends and family. But what about when it happens in a sales call? It's entirely possible for us to finish the call, neither of us realizing the misunderstanding. Worst case, this can lead to a discount-revenge event. Best case, misunderstandings lead to missed opportunities — to connect, to build a relationship, or even to close business.

There's a lot going on when we talk with each other: Words, moods, tones, facial expressions, body language — conscious and unconscious stuff moving back and forth. So here's the rub: When we perceive a mismatch in someone's words and tones, or body language, etc., our (usually) unconscious alarm bells go off. At some level, we start wondering if what's said is true, if we can trust the person. Certainly we are listening a little less as our mind starts trying to figure out what's going on here.

According to Nick Morgan in *New Science on Influencing Others*: *"We can avoid undermining our own best interests with nonverbal cues that don't align with our intentions. A speaker with arms crossed is protecting his vital organs, signaling low-level danger in the language of the unconscious. This [sic] will make everyone in the room nervous; no one will hear [fully]*

what the speaker is trying to say. Don't think that people will simply dismiss his body language as nervousness, warranting empathy; that would be a rational explanation from the conscious mind. It is the unconscious mind's interpretation that hold more sway.”¹

The fact is when if we talk about feelings, ideas, or attitudes and there is a mismatch in communication, words account for only 7% of the meaning, while tone accounts for 38% and body language for 55%.² That's why it is so very important to be congruent when we communicate. Our facial expression, body language, tone and words need to be working together, in authentic alignment.

In reality, it's actually hard to fake it. Unconsciously our faces make minuscule expressions that others readily perceive unconsciously. And that's on the unconscious level. Now add in body language, and tone. How often have you thought, *“Hmm, he doesn't sound like he means it.”* or, *“I don't believe a word he says.”*

Try this: Sit in front of a mirror. Now say out loud, the word *“Really!”* three times. The first time, say it with wonder and awe; the second time, say it with doubt, and the third time say it in a neutral voice. What do you notice? (Did you notice the subtle changes in your face as you changed your tone? I bet you did.) Try doing this exercise with a colleague; take turns listening

¹ Nick Morgan, *New Science on Influencing Others*, Harvard Business School Publishing, June 17, 2014.

² Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967

and speaking. Notice the impact tone, even in this single word, has on the message. Notice how the face and body language change with the tone.

Lessons:

- It's not just words — a lot of communication is in the non-verbals. So in your mind, be clear as to your intention because the subconscious conversation is always going on.
- When we aren't sure what someone means, the words don't count for as much (7%) as the tones and non-verbals (93%).
- It's easy to misunderstand the words when there is no seeing or hearing in the communication — e.g., email, Tweets, etc. (need I say more?).

And, keep in mind the great irony of human nature: We are pretty darn good at sensing when someone is faking it, yet when we ourselves try to fake it, we like to think we are pulling it off.

Oh, and don't forget to headline! Practice headlining your thoughts before you speak and watch what happens.