



# READ MATTHEWS

TRAINING IN MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION SKILLS

## In form

In Form no. 26

### The Body Shop

Let's start with a question for our female readers: Ladies... ever wondered why your husbands and boyfriends are so poor at interpreting how you are feeling?

And here's one for the men: Gentlemen... ever wondered why it's so difficult to lie to your wives and girlfriends and not get caught?

The answers to these questions have a lot to do with how sensitive we are to body language. As long ago as the 1950s research indicated that body language was the single most important factor in the total communicative impact of a message. More recent work has shown that about 60% of the communication in face-to-face conversation is non-verbal. It's the old story: It's not what you say, but how you say it.

And women are more sensitive to body language than men. Psychologists at Harvard University have found that women are able to interpret body language accurately 87% of the time, while men get it right only 42% of the time. Women's intuition, then, may be no more than the ability to read non-verbal signals that are there for all to see.

Man or woman, you need to keep your eyes wide open to make sure you don't misinterpret these signals. Allan & Barbara Pease, co-authors of *The Definitive Book of Body Language* (ISBN 978-0-7528-5878-4), advise us to follow three basic rules to get things right.

#### Rule 1: Read Gestures in Clusters

Never interpret a gesture in isolation of other gestures. Like words, gestures can have more than one meaning. And just as the meanings of words may only become clear when you read them in the context of the words around them, so gestures can only be accurately defined by looking at the bigger picture. In other words, you can't conclude that the man talking to you is lying just because he begins to scratch his nose. He may simply be suffering from an itchy nose! To feel sure that he is lying, you'd need more evidence - perhaps a cluster of nose scratching gestures while simultaneously averting his gaze from you.

#### Rule 2: Look for Congruence

Congruence means that the verbal and body language channels are in harmony - they are sending the same message. Confusion arises when you receive crossed signals, when the body language contradicts what the person is saying. When you observe gesture clusters that match the verbal message, you can be confident you are interpreting the body language accurately.

### Rule 3: Read Gestures in Context

Body language gestures must always be considered in context. How do you know if the woman sitting with arms and legs crossed is feeling defensive or just trying to keep warm? The answer depends completely on the context. If she is sitting on a park bench on a crisp autumn day, we imagine she's just trying to stay warm. But if the same gestures occur while she is sitting in a meeting, our interpretation is likely to be different. It's no more than common sense really.

Applying these three simple rules will help you get it right more often than not. If you'd like to learn more about the communicative impact of your body language, just sign up for one of our Communication & Interpersonal Skills courses. More information at [www.readmatthews.com/courses.html](http://www.readmatthews.com/courses.html)

**A note of warning for our female readers:** Don't forget what happened to Dr. Frankenstein! When your man starts to learn more about body language, you'll find he's more aware of your feelings. But you will also find that he's a more expert liar! Life is full of difficult choices...

READ MATTHEWS Lope de Vega 36, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
**e-mail:** [rm@readmatthews.com](mailto:rm@readmatthews.com) - **Voice:** (+34) 914 292 115 - **Fax:** (+34) 913 691 965  
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