



Communicate with Power: Master the Unconscious

Most communication is unconscious. You may think you're delivering clear and consistent messages based on your words, but unconscious nonverbal behaviors are key to communicating with power.

Startling advances in brain science have made it possible for us to gather and test evidence as we uncover the unconscious mind's amazing strengths. While our conscious brains can handle some 40 bits of information per second, the unconscious mind processes an astounding 11 million bits per second.

Evolution has given our unconscious minds the ability to handle most incoming cues automatically and rapidly, thus freeing our conscious minds to make complex decisions. Much of this activity occurs instantaneously, nonverbally and unconsciously.

Your unconscious mind is at work when:

- You quickly brake or swerve to avoid an object in the road.
- You physically shift position to mirror a colleague's posture.
- You and a friend simultaneously blurt out the same phrase or idea.
- You have a gut feeling that the person speaking to you is concealing information.

Without the participation of your unconscious mind, you'd react too slowly to avoid danger, would have a hard time relating to others and would be unable to read emotional cues that detect lies or authenticity.

The same holds true for leadership communication. If you rely solely on your words, you're missing opportunities to inspire others. Studies continue to confirm that listeners perceive a message's meaning largely through nonverbal, subconscious processing.

Despite all of this research, some of us cling to the notion that we rule our unconscious minds, and not

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?



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326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL
www.ProffittManagement.com
561-582-6060
info@proffittmanagement.com

vice versa. In truth, we make most decisions unconsciously, only becoming aware of them when we start to act upon them.

What Science Reveals

“We create a leader to make us feel safe and to give us a group purpose or direction. Because, like a group of fish or birds or zebra, we need and want guidance.” ~ Nick Morgan, *Power Cues: The Subtle Science of Leading Groups, Persuading Others, and Maximizing Your Personal Impact* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2014)

We are more communal than we’d like to think. As humans evolved, we depended on one another for survival. Leadership was essential and instinctive. We knew who we could trust for guidance, even before we mastered language.

Nonverbal communication was vital – and still is. Recent scientific breakthroughs have changed conventional wisdom about how we communicate with others, how we interpret what they say and how we discern leadership potential. Some of the more interesting findings include:

- We gesture before we consciously think about doing so.
- Our brain’s mirror neurons fire when we observe others experiencing emotions, and we wind up experiencing similar feelings. These “contagious emotions” allow us to connect with one another, experience empathy and anticipate thoughts.
- If you lose your ability to process emotions, you’ll also lose your capacity to remember or decide anything.
- You emit low-frequency sounds that align with the most powerful person near you through matching vocal tones.
- When you’re involved in a negotiation, the measurable nonverbal signals associated with your confidence level more accurately predict success or failure than the relative merits of your position or words.
- Neurons are distributed throughout your body, not just in your brain. Sensitive neurons live in the heart and gut.
- When you communicate with someone else, your brain patterns align – even if you happen to disagree.

These findings are critically important to anyone who aspires to assume a leadership position. Your influence expands when you harness the power of unconscious communication: your body language, hand gestures, facial expressions and vocal qualities.

Always remember that people are naturally drawn to leaders who establish trust and confidence through powerful communication cues. These unconscious elements affect the messages you send and receive.

7 Power Cues

While it’s nice to believe in personal autonomy, most of us have an exaggerated sense of what we control – particularly our thoughts and feelings. We can, however, learn to master leadership communication by becoming more aware of unconscious mental activity. You’ll be rewarded with greater control of conversations, meetings and personal interactions.

While mind control isn’t in the cards, you can learn to become more intuitive. As Morgan asserts:

“Power in human communications and relations is indeed determined largely by the interplay of our unconscious minds...You can learn how to literally synchronize other’s brain waves with your own.”

He encourages leaders to master seven essential power cues for better communication:

1. Self-Awareness: How do you show up when you walk into a room? Take control of your presence, and change both your thinking and the messages you send to those around you.

For a long time, we’ve misunderstood the importance of gestures. Researchers previously thought the gestures that accompany speech were meaningless. We now know they’re meaningful and that they precede speech by a nanosecond or two.

The first step in communication mastery is assessing your posture, physical presence and gestures. Keep a diary or take video of yourself to evaluate (as objectively as possible) how you appear to others.

Self-assessment of your confidence, intuition and charisma starts you on the road to mastering leadership communication.

2. Nonverbal Communications: Take charge of your nonverbal communications to project the persona you desire.

Nonverbal behaviors are a natural expression of our feelings. Which emotions do you convey through body language during important moments, conversations, meetings and presentations? When you share your emotions, you can actually control a group's mood.

Admittedly, it can be hard to think consciously about body language. Start by focusing on your emotions. Ask yourself how you feel about the issue at hand. Focused emotions greatly increase charisma. Prepare your emotions for important meetings, conversations and presentations, just as you would organize your content.

When you're clear about your emotions, your body language will communicate them naturally. Others pick up on your emotional cues through their mirror neurons. You essentially "leak" your emotions to them.

3. Unconscious Messages: Read others' unconscious messages. Observe your own mirror-neuron experiences. Become attuned to the hidden messages sent out by everyone around you.

4. Leadership Voice: You can turn your voice into a commanding instrument that helps you take charge of a room. Fine-tune your voice to lead your peers.

Each of us emits low-frequency sounds when we speak – tones that help convey our leadership presence. People unconsciously defer to leaders who produce stronger low-frequency sounds.

You can learn to increase your voice's leadership potential through breathing dynamics, vocal exercises and practicing vocal tonality. Some leaders choose to work with a voice coach.

5. Social Signals: The fifth power cue combines your voice and a host of other social signals to greatly increase your success in pitches, meetings, sales situations and the like. What signals do you send out in work and social situations? Establish the right levels of energy and passion to win the contract, negotiation or raise.

MIT researchers have pinpointed four patterns of behavior that predict success or failure in key human interactions:

- A. Influence** - Boost your positional power, emotion or expertise. Control the give-and-take tempo of a conversation.
- B. Mimicry** - Consciously copy others and then lead them.

C. Activity - Focus more intently on the conversation, meeting or presentation.

D. Consistency - Increase your consistency to gain support; decrease it to show openness.

6. Unconscious Reprogramming: Use the power of your unconscious mind to make decisions, rid yourself of phobias and fears, and create a more successful persona. You may need to craft and repeat a positive mantra to program your thinking. Is your unconscious mind holding you back or propelling you forward? Shed your unconscious mind of the blocks and impediments to success.

Your unconscious mind determines your emotional attitudes, which either help or limit you as a leader. You can take charge of your inner dialogues by replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk. Take charge of your posture and facial expressions through practice.

7. Synchronize with Stories: Put all of the steps together by mastering the art of storytelling. When we tell each other stories, our brain patterns synchronize and people are more likely to listen to you. Stories enhance your natural leadership capacity, increase your charisma and move others to action. Convey your message in ways that align people with you, down to their very brain waves.

A great story is relevant to people's universal desires and grabs your audience. Select one of the five archetypal stories: a quest, stranger in a strange land, love story, rags to riches or revenge. Tell the story in three acts: dilemma, conflict, resolution. Great storytelling is more art than science because you must invoke emotions.

Leadership Requires Alignment

When you're more aware of unconscious behavior, you can align your conscious and unconscious messages for improved communication. This increases your authenticity, improves your ability to lead a group, persuades others and maximizes your personal impact.

As Morgan notes:

"No one gets led anywhere they don't want to go. Machiavelli was wrong; leadership is not manipulation, not in the long run. It's alignment, the leader with the group and the group with the leader. But you first have to maximize and focus your leadership strengths in order to be ready when your moment comes."

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326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL 33405



561-582-6060
info@proffittmanagement.com
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