

WHAT EVERY BODY IS SAYING

An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide
to Speed-Reading People



JOE NAVARRO

with Marvin Karlins, Ph.D.

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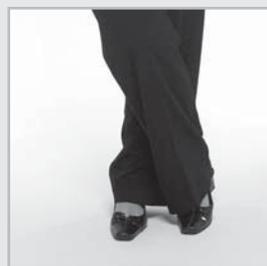
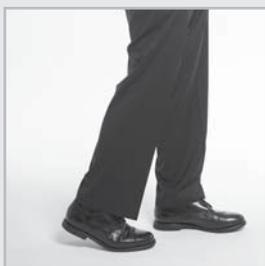
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To my grandmother, Adelina, whose withered
hands lovingly molded a child into a man.

—**JOE NAVARRO**

To my wife, Edyth, who has blessed me with her love
and taught me what it means to be a caring human being.

—**MARVIN KARLINS**

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FOREWORD

I See What You're Thinking

Marvin Karlins, Ph.D.

The man sat stoically at one end of the table, carefully crafting his replies to the FBI agent's inquiries. He wasn't considered a major suspect in the murder case. His alibi was believable and he sounded sincere, but the agent pressed on nevertheless. With the suspect's consent, he was asked a series of questions about the murder weapon:

“If you had committed this crime, would you have used a gun?”

“If you had committed this crime, would you have used a knife?”

“If you had committed this crime, would you have used an ice pick?”

“If you had committed this crime, would you have used a hammer?”

One of the weapons, the ice pick, had actually been used in the commission of the crime, but that information had been kept from the public. Thus, only the killer would know which object was the real murder weapon. As the FBI agent went down the list of weapons, he

observed the suspect carefully. When the ice pick was mentioned, the man's eyelids came down hard and stayed down until the next weapon was named. The agent instantly understood the significance of the eyelid behavior he had witnessed, and from that moment forward the "minor" suspect became the primary person of interest in the investigation. He later confessed to the crime.

Chalk one up for Joe Navarro, a remarkable human being who, in addition to unmasking the ice-pick killer, is credited with catching scores of criminals, including "master spies," in a distinguished twenty-five-year career with the FBI. How was he able to do this? If you asked him, he quietly would say, "I owe it to being able to read people."

Joe, it turns out, has spent his entire professional life studying, refining, and applying the science of nonverbal communications—facial expressions, gestures, physical movements (kinesics), body distance (proxemics), touching (haptics), posture, even clothing—to decipher what people are thinking, how they intend to act, and whether their pronouncements are true or false. This is *not* good news for criminals, terrorists, and spies, who, under his careful scrutiny, usually give off more than enough nonverbal body signals ("tells") to make their thoughts and intentions transparent and detectable.

It is, however, very good news for you, the reader, because the very same nonverbal knowledge Joe relied on to become a master "Spycatcher," "human lie detector," and instructor at the FBI is what he will be sharing with you so you can better understand the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of those around you. As a renowned author and educator, Joe will teach you how to observe like an expert, detecting and deciphering the nonverbal behaviors of others so you can interact with them more successfully. For business or for pleasure, this knowledge will enrich and magnify your life.

Much of what Joe will be sharing with you in this book was not even recognized fifteen years ago by the scientific community. It is only through recent advances in brain-scan technology and neural imaging that scientists have been able to establish the validity of the behaviors Joe will be describing. Drawing from the latest discoveries in psychology,

neurobiology, medicine, sociology, criminology, communication studies, and anthropology—plus his quarter century of experience using nonverbal behavior in his work as an FBI Special Agent—Joe is uniquely qualified to help you succeed in your understanding of nonverbal communications. His expertise is recognized and sought worldwide. Besides being interviewed regularly on programs such as NBC’s *Today Show*, *CNN Headline News*, *Fox Cable News*, and ABC’s *Good Morning America*, he continues to conduct seminars on nonverbal communication for the FBI and the CIA, as well as for other members of the intelligence community. He is a consultant to the banking and insurance industries as well as to major law firms in the United States and abroad. Joe also teaches at Saint Leo University and at various medical schools throughout the United States, where his unique insights into nonverbal communication have found a receptive audience among many, including physicians desiring to assess patients with greater speed and accuracy. Joe’s combination of academic skills and occupational credentials—coupled with his masterful analysis of nonverbal communications in real-life, high-stakes situations—has placed him apart and in the forefront of nonverbal expertise, as you will discover in this book.

After working with Joe, attending his seminars, and putting his ideas to work in my own life, I firmly believe that the material in these pages represents a major advance in our understanding of all things nonverbal. I say this as a trained psychologist who got involved in this writing project because I was excited by Joe’s pioneering work in harnessing the *scientific* knowledge of nonverbal communications to achieve professional objectives and personal success.

I was also impressed by his reasoned, careful approach to the topic. For example, while observing nonverbals allows us to get an “accurate read” on many kinds of behavior, Joe warns us that using body language to detect deception is a particularly difficult and challenging task. This is a significant insight—rarely recognized by laypeople or by the law enforcement community—and serves as a critical and poignant reminder to be *very* careful before you declare a person to be honest or dishonest based on his nonverbal behaviors.

Unlike many other books on nonverbal behavior, the information presented herein is based on scientific facts and field-tested findings rather than on personal opinion and armchair speculations. Further, the text highlights what other published works often ignore: the critical role played by the *limbic system* of the human brain in understanding and using nonverbal cues effectively.

The silent language of the body can be yours to master. Whether you are studying nonverbals because you want to get ahead in your job or simply want to get along better with friends and family, this book is designed for you. Gaining proficiency will require a careful examination of the chapters that follow, plus a commitment to spend some serious time and energy learning and applying Joe's teachings in your daily routines.

Reading people successfully—learning, decoding, and utilizing nonverbal behavior to predict human actions—is a task well worth your attention, one that offers ample rewards for the effort expended. So plant your feet firmly on the floor, turn to the next page, and get ready to learn and watch for those all-important nonverbal behaviors that Joe will be teaching you. It won't be long before you discover, with just a glance, what every *body* is saying.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I started writing the early drafts of this book, I realized that this project had been long in the making. It did not start with my interest in reading about nonverbal behavior, nor in pursuing it academically, nor in the FBI. Rather, in a real sense, it started with my family many years earlier.

I learned to read others primarily from the teachings of my parents, Albert and Mariana Lopez, and my grandmother, Adelina Paniagua Espino. Each in his or her own way taught me something different about the significance and power of nonverbal communications. From my mother, I learned that nonverbals are invaluable in dealing with others. A subtle behavior, she taught me, can avert an awkward situation or can make someone completely comfortable—a skill she has performed effortlessly all of her life. From my father, I learned the power of expression;

with one look he can communicate volumes with exquisite clarity. He is a man who commands respect, just by being. And from my grandmother, to whom I dedicate this book, I learned that small behaviors have great significance: a smile, a head tilt, a gentle touch at the right time can convey so much; it can even heal. These things they taught me every day, and in so doing, prepared me to observe more aptly the world around me. Their teachings as well as those of many others are found in these pages.

While I was at Brigham Young University, J. Wesley Sherwood, Richard Townsend, and Dean Clive Winn II taught me much about police work and observing criminals. Later, in the FBI, people such as Doug Gregory, Tom Riley, Julian “Jay” Koerner, Dr. Richard Ault, and David G. Major taught me the subtle nuances of counterintelligence and espionage behavior. To them I am grateful for sharpening my people-watching skills. Similarly, I have to thank Dr. John Schafer, former FBI agent and fellow member of the bureau’s elite Behavioral Analysis Program, who encouraged me to write and allowed me to be his coauthor on multiple occasions. Marc Reeser, who was with me in the trenches catching spies for so long, also deserves my recognition. To my other colleagues, and there were many in the National Security Division of the FBI, I thank you for all your support.

Over the years, the FBI ensured we were taught by the best, and so at the hands of professors Joe Kulis, Paul Ekman, Maureen O’Sullivan, Mark Frank, Bella M. DePaulo, Aldert Vrij, Reid Meloy, and Judy Burgoon I learned about the research on nonverbal communications directly or through their writings. I developed a friendship with many of these individuals, including David Givens, who heads the Center for Nonverbal Studies in Spokane, Washington, and whose writings, teachings, and admonitions I have taken to heart. Their research and writings have enriched my life, and I have included their work in this volume as well as that of other giants such as Desmond Morris, Edward Hall, and Charles Darwin, who started it all with his seminal book *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*.

While these people provided the academic framework, others contributed in their own ways to this project, and I must recognize them

individually. My dear friend Elizabeth Lee Barron, at the University of Tampa, is a godsend when it comes to research. I am also indebted to Dr. Phil Quinn at the University of Tampa and to Professor Barry Glover, at Saint Leo University, for their years of friendship and willingness to accommodate my busy travel schedule.

This book would not be the same without photographs, and for that I am grateful for the work of renowned photographer Mark Wemple. My gratitude also goes out to Ashlee B. Castle, my administrative assistant, who, when asked if she was willing to make faces for a book, merely said, “Sure, why not?” You guys are great. I also want to thank Tampa artist David R. Andrade for his illustrations.

Matthew Benjamin, my ever-patient editor at HarperCollins, put this project together and deserves my praise for being a gentleman and a consummate professional. My praise also goes to Executive Editor Toni Sciarra, who worked so diligently to finalize this project. Matthew and Toni work with a wonderful team of people at HarperCollins, including copy editor Paula Cooper, to whom I owe many thanks. And as before, I want to thank Dr. Marvin Karlins for once again shaping my ideas into this book and for his kind words in the foreword.

My gratitude goes out to my dear friend Dr. Elizabeth A. Murray, a true scientist and educator, who took time out from her busy teaching schedule to edit the early drafts of this manuscript and share her voluminous knowledge of the human body.

To my family—all of my family, near and far—I thank you for tolerating me and my writing when I should have been relaxing with you. To Luca, *muito obrigado*. To my daughter, Stephanie, I give thanks every day for your loving soul.

All of these individuals have contributed to this book in some way; their knowledge and insight, small and large, is shared with you herein. I wrote this book with the sober knowledge that many of you will use this information in your daily lives. To that end, I have worked assiduously to present both the science and the empirical information with diligence and clarity. If there are any errors in this book, they are my responsibility and mine alone.

There is an old Latin saying, “Qui docet, discit” (He who teaches, learns). In many ways, writing is no different; it is a process of learning and discerning, which at the end of the day has been a pleasure. It is my hope that when you come to the end of this book, you too will have gained a profound knowledge of how we communicate nonverbally—and that your life will be enriched, as mine has been, by knowing what every *body* is saying.

Joe Navarro
Tampa, Florida
August 2007

ONE

Mastering the Secrets of Nonverbal Communication

Whenever I'm teaching people about "body language," this question is invariably asked. "Joe, what got you interested in studying nonverbal behavior in the first place?" It wasn't something I had planned to do, nor was it the result of some long-term fascination with the topic. It was much more down-to-earth than that. It was an interest born of necessity, the need to adapt successfully to a totally new way of life. When I was eight years old, I came to America as an exile from Cuba. We left just a few months after the Bay of Pigs invasion, and we honestly thought we would be here only for a short while as refugees.

Unable to speak English at first, I did what thousands of other immigrants coming to this country have done. I quickly learned that to fit in with my new classmates at school, I needed to be aware of—and sensitive to—the "other" language around me, the language of nonverbal

behavior. I found that was a language I *could* translate and understand immediately. In my young mind, I saw the human body as a kind of billboard that transmitted (advertised) what a person was thinking via gestures, facial expressions, and physical movements that I could read. Over time, obviously, I learned English—and even lost some skill with the Spanish language—but the nonverbals, I never forgot. I discovered at an early age that I could always rely on nonverbal communications.

I learned to use body language to decipher what my classmates and teachers were trying to communicate to me and how they felt about me. One of the first things I noticed was that students or teachers who genuinely liked me would raise (or arch) their eyebrows when they first saw me walk into the room. On the other hand, those individuals who weren't too friendly toward me would squint their eyes slightly when I appeared—a behavior that once observed is never forgotten. I used this nonverbal information, as so many other immigrants have, quickly to evaluate and develop friendships, to communicate despite the obvious language barrier, to avoid enemies, and in nurturing healthy relationships. Many years later I would use these same nonverbal eye behaviors to solve crimes as a special agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (see box 1).

Based on my background, education, and training, I want to teach you to see the world as an FBI expert on nonverbal communication views it: as a vivid, dynamic environment where every human interaction resonates with information, and as an opportunity to use the silent language of the body to enrich your knowledge of what people are thinking, feeling, and intending to do. Using this knowledge will help you stand out among others. It will also protect you and give you previously hidden insight into human behavior.

WHAT EXACTLY IS NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION?

Nonverbal communication, often referred to as nonverbal behavior or body language, is a means of transmitting information—just like the spoken word—except it is achieved through facial expressions, gestures,

BOX 1: IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

“Eye-blocking” is a nonverbal behavior that can occur when we feel threatened and/or don’t like what we see. Squinting (as in the case with my classmates, described above) and closing or shielding our eyes are actions that have evolved to protect the brain from “seeing” undesirable images and to communicate our disdain toward others.

As an investigator, I used eye-blocking behaviors to assist in the arson investigation of a tragic hotel fire in Puerto Rico that claimed ninety-seven lives. A security guard came under immediate suspicion because the blaze broke out in an area where he was assigned. One of the ways we determined he had nothing to do with starting the fire was by asking him some very specific questions as to where he was before the fire, at the time of the fire, and whether or not he set the fire. After each question I observed his face for any telltale signs of eye-block behavior. His eyes blocked only when questioned about where he was when the fire started. Oddly, in contrast, he did not seem troubled by the question, “Did you set the fire?” This told me the real issue was his location at the time of the fire, not his possible involvement in setting the fire. He was questioned further on this topic by the lead investigators and eventually admitted to leaving his post to visit his girlfriend, who also worked at the hotel. Unfortunately, while he was gone, the arsonists entered the area he should have been guarding and started the fire.

In this case, the guard’s eye-blocking behavior gave us the insight we needed to pursue a line of questioning that eventually broke the case open. In the end, three arsonists responsible for the tragic blaze were arrested and convicted of the crime. The security guard, while woefully negligent and burdened with tremendous guilt, was not, however, the culprit.

touching (haptics), physical movements (kinesics), posture, body adornment (clothes, jewelry, hairstyle, tattoos, etc.), and even the tone, timbre, and volume of an individual's voice (rather than spoken content). Nonverbal behaviors comprise approximately 60 to 65 percent of all interpersonal communication and, during lovemaking, can constitute 100 percent of communication between partners (Burgoon, 1994, 229–285).

Nonverbal communication can also reveal a person's true thoughts, feelings, and intentions. For this reason, nonverbal behaviors are sometimes referred to as *tells* (they tell us about the person's true state of mind). Because people are not always aware they are communicating nonverbally, body language is often more honest than an individual's verbal pronouncements, which are consciously crafted to accomplish the speaker's objectives (see box 2).

BOX 2: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

A memorable example of how body language can sometimes be more truthful than verbal language involved the rape of a young woman on the Parker Indian Reservation in Arizona. A suspect in the case was brought in for questioning. His words sounded convincing and his story was plausible. He claimed he hadn't seen the victim and while out in a field had gone down a row of cotton, turned left, and then walked straight to his house. While my colleagues jotted down notes about what they were hearing, I kept my eyes on the suspect and saw that as he told the story about turning left and going home, his hand gestured *to his right*, which was exactly the direction that led to the rape scene. If I hadn't been watching him, I wouldn't have caught the discrepancy between his verbal ("I went left") and nonverbal (hand gesturing to the right) behavior. But once I saw it I suspected he was lying. I waited a while and then confronted him again, and in the end he confessed to the crime.

Whenever your observation of another person's nonverbal behavior helps you understand that person's feelings, intentions, or actions—or clarifies his or her spoken words—then you have successfully decoded and used this silent medium.

USING NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR TO ENHANCE YOUR LIFE

It has been well established by researchers that those who can effectively read and interpret nonverbal communication, and manage how others perceive them, will enjoy greater success in life than individuals who lack this skill (Goleman, 1995, 13–92). It is the goal of this book to teach you how to observe the world around you and to determine the meaning of nonverbals in any setting. This powerful knowledge will enhance your personal interactions and enrich your life, as it has mine.

One of the fascinating things about an appreciation for nonverbal behavior is its universal applicability. It works everywhere humans interact. Nonverbals are ubiquitous and reliable. Once you know what a specific nonverbal behavior means, you can use that information in any number of different circumstances and in all types of environments. In fact, it is difficult to interact effectively without nonverbals. If you ever wondered why people still fly to meetings in the age of computers, text messages, e-mails, telephones, and video conferencing, it is because of the need to express and observe nonverbal communications in person. Nothing beats seeing the nonverbals up close and personal. Why? Because nonverbals are powerful and they have meaning. Whatever you learn from this book, you will be able to apply to any situation, in any setting. Case in point (see box 3 on next page):

BOX 3: GIVING A DOCTOR THE UPPER HAND

Several months ago I presented a seminar to a group of poker players on how to use nonverbal behavior to read their opponents' hands and win more money at the tables. Because poker is a game that emphasizes bluffing and deception, players have a keen interest in being able to read the tells of their opponents. For them, decoding nonverbal communications is critical to success. While many were grateful for the insights I provided, what startled me was how many seminar participants were able to see the value of understanding and utilizing nonverbal behavior beyond the poker table.

Two weeks after the session ended I received an e-mail from one of the participants, a physician from Texas. "What I find most amazing," he wrote me, "is that what I learned in your seminar has also helped me in my practice. The nonverbals you taught us in order to read poker players have helped me read my patients, too. Now I can sense when they are uncomfortable, confident, or not being entirely truthful." The doctor's note speaks to the universality of nonverbals and their value in all facets of life.

**MASTERING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS
REQUIRES A PARTNERSHIP**

I am convinced that any person possessing normal intelligence can learn to use nonverbal communication to better themselves. I know this because for the past two decades I have taught thousands of people, just like you, how to successfully decode nonverbal behavior and use that information to enrich their lives, the lives of their loved ones, and to achieve their personal and professional goals. Accomplishing this, however, requires that you and I establish a working partnership, each contributing something of significance to our mutual effort.

Following the Ten Commandments for Observing and Decoding Nonverbal Communications Successfully

Reading people successfully—collecting nonverbal intelligence to assess their thoughts, feelings, and intentions—is a skill that requires constant practice and proper training. To help you on the training side, I want to provide you with some important guidelines—or commandments—to maximize your effectiveness in reading nonverbals. As you incorporate these commandments into your everyday life and make them part of your routine, they soon will become second nature to you, needing little, if any, conscious thought. It’s a lot like learning to drive. Do you remember the first time you gave that a go? If you were like me, you were so concerned with operating the vehicle that it was difficult to track what you were doing *inside* the car and concentrate on what was happening on the road *outside* at the same time. It was only when you felt comfortable behind the wheel that you were able to expand your focus to encompass the total driving environment. That’s the way it is with nonverbal behavior. Once you master the mechanics of using nonverbal communication effectively, it will become automatic and you can focus your full attention on decoding the world around you.

Commandment 1: Be a competent observer of your environment.

This is the most basic requirement for anyone wishing to decode and use nonverbal communications.

Imagine the foolishness of trying to listen to someone with plugs in our ears. We couldn’t hear the message and whatever was said would be lost on us. Thus, most intent listeners don’t go around wearing ear-plugs! Yet, when it comes to seeing the silent language of nonverbal behavior, many viewers might as well be wearing blindfolds, as oblivious as they are to the body signals around them. Consider this. Just as careful *listening* is critical to understanding our verbal pronouncements, so careful *observation* is vital to comprehending our body language. Whoa! Don’t just breeze past that sentence and continue

reading. What it states is critical. *Concerted* (effortful) *observation*—is absolutely essential to reading people and detecting their nonverbal tells successfully.

The problem is that most people spend their lives looking but not truly seeing, or, as Sherlock Holmes, the meticulous English detective, declared to his partner, Dr. Watson, “You see, but you do not observe.” Sadly, the majority of individuals view their surroundings with a minimal amount of observational effort. Such people are oblivious to subtle changes in their world. They are unaware of the rich tapestry of details that surrounds them, such as the subtle movement of a person’s hand or foot that might betray his thoughts or intentions.

In fact, various scientific studies have demonstrated people to be poor observers of their world. For example, when a man dressed in a gorilla suit walked in front of a group of students while other activities were taking place, half the students didn’t even notice the gorilla in their midst (Simons & Chabris, 1999, 1059–1074)!

Observation-impooverished individuals lack what airline pilots refer to as “situational awareness,” which is a sense of where one is at all times; they don’t have a solid mental picture of exactly what is going on around them or even in front of them. Ask them to go into a strange room filled with people, give them a chance to look around, and then tell them to close their eyes and report what they saw. You would be astounded by their inability to recall even the most obvious features in the room.

I find it disheartening how often we run into somebody or read about someone who always seems to be blindsided by life’s events. The complaints of these individuals are nearly always the same:

“My wife just filed for divorce. I never had a clue she was unhappy with our marriage.”

“The guidance counselor tells me my son has been using cocaine for three years. I had no idea he had a drug problem.”

“I was arguing with this guy and out of nowhere he sucker punched me. I never saw it coming.”

“I thought the boss was pretty happy with my job performance. I had no idea I was going to be fired.”

These are the kinds of statements made by men and women who have never learned how to observe the world around them effectively. Such inadequacies are not surprising, really. After all, as we grow from children to adults, we’re never instructed on how to observe the nonverbal clues of others. There are no classes in elementary school, high school, or college that teach people situational awareness. If you’re lucky, you teach yourself to be more observant. If you don’t, you miss out on an incredible amount of useful information that could help you avoid problems and make your life more fulfilling, be it when dating, at work, or with family.

Fortunately, observation is a skill that can be learned. We don’t have to go through life being blindsided. Furthermore, because it is a skill, we can get better at it with the right kind of training and practice. If you are observationally “challenged,” do not despair. You can overcome your weakness in this area if you are willing to devote time and effort to observing your world more conscientiously.

What you need to do is make observation—concerted observation—a way of life. Becoming aware of the world around you is not a passive act. It is a conscious, deliberate behavior—something that takes effort, energy, and concentration to achieve, and *constant practice* to maintain. Observation is like a muscle. It grows stronger with use and atrophies without use. Exercise your observation muscle and you will become a more powerful decoder of the world around you.

By the way, when I speak of concerted observation, I am asking you to utilize all your senses, not just your sense of sight. Whenever I walk into my apartment, I take a deep breath. If things don’t smell “normal” I become concerned. One time I detected the slight odor of lingering cigarette smoke when I returned home from a trip. My nose alerted me to possible danger well before my eyes could scan my apartment. It turned

out that the apartment maintenance man had been by to fix a leaky pipe, and the smoke on his clothes and skin were still lingering in the air several hours later. Fortunately, he was a welcome intruder, but there could just as easily have been a burglar lurking in the next room. The point is, by using all my senses, I was better able to assess my environment and contribute to my own safety and well-being.

Commandment 2: Observing in context is key to understanding nonverbal behavior. When trying to understand nonverbal behavior in real-life situations, the more you understand the *context* in which it takes place, the better you will be at understanding what it means. For example, after a traffic accident, I expect people to be in shock and to walk around looking dazed. I expect their hands to shake and even for them to make poor decisions like walking into oncoming traffic. (This is why officers ask you to stay in your car.) Why? After an accident, people are suffering the effects of a complete hijacking of the “thinking” brain by a region of the brain known as the *limbic system*. The result of this hijacking includes behaviors such as trembling, disorientation, nervousness, and discomfort. In context, these actions are to be expected and confirm the stress from the accident. During a job interview, I expect applicants to be nervous initially and for that nervousness to dissipate. If it shows up again when I ask specific questions, then I have to wonder why these nervous behaviors have suddenly presented again.

Commandment 3: Learn to recognize and decode nonverbal behaviors that are universal. Some body behaviors are considered universal because they are exhibited similarly by most people. For instance, when people press their lips together in a manner that seems to make them disappear, it is a clear and common sign that they are troubled and something is wrong. This nonverbal behavior, known as *lip compression*, is one of the *universal tells* that I will be describing in the chapters to follow (see box 4). The more of these universal nonverbals you can recognize and accurately interpret, the more effective you will be in assessing the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of those around you.

BOX 4: A PURSING OF LIPS LEADS TO SAVINGS ON SHIPS

Universal tells of the lips were very helpful to me during a consulting assignment with a British shipping company. My British client had asked me to sit through their contract negotiations with a huge multinational corporation that would be outfitting their vessels. I agreed and suggested that the proposed contract be presented point by point, with agreement being reached on each item before moving forward. That way I could more closely watch the corporate negotiator for any nonverbals that might reveal information helpful to my client.

“I’ll pass you a note if I spot something that needs your attention,” I told my client and then settled back to watch the parties review the contract clause by clause. I didn’t have long to wait before I saw an important tell. When a clause detailing the outfitting of a specific part of the vessel was read—a construction phase involving millions of dollars—the chief negotiator from the multinational corporation pursed his lips, a clear indication that something in this part of the contract was not to his liking.

I passed a note to my client, warning him that this particular clause in the contract was contentious or problematic and should be revisited and discussed thoroughly while we were all still together.

By confronting the issue then and there—and focusing on the details of the clause in question—the two negotiators were able to hammer out an agreement face-to-face, which ended up saving my client 13.5 million dollars. The negotiator’s nonverbal signal of displeasure was the key evidence needed to spot a specific problem and deal with it immediately and effectively.

Commandment 4: Learn to recognize and decode idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors. Universal nonverbal behaviors constitute one group of body cues: those that are relatively the same for everyone. There is a second type of body cue called an *idiosyncratic nonverbal behavior*, which is a signal that is relatively unique to a particular individual.

In attempting to identify idiosyncratic signals, you'll want to be on the lookout for *behavioral patterns* in people you interact with on a regular basis (friends, family, coworkers, persons who provide goods or services to you on a consistent basis). The better you know an individual, or the longer you interact with him or her, the easier it will be to discover this information because you will have a larger database upon which to make your judgments. For example, if you note your teenager scratches his head and bites his lip when he is about to take a test, this may be a reliable idiosyncratic tell that speaks of his nervousness or lack of preparation. No doubt this has become part of his repertoire for dealing with stress, and you will see it again and again because "the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior."

Commandment 5: When you interact with others, try to establish their baseline behaviors. In order to get a handle on the *baseline behaviors* of the people with whom you regularly interact, you need to note how they look normally, how they typically sit, where they place their hands, the usual position of their feet, their posture and common facial expressions, the tilt of their heads, and even where they generally place or hold their possessions, such as a purse (see figures 1 and 2). You need to be able to differentiate between their "normal" face and their "stressed" face.

Not getting a baseline puts you in the same position as parents who never look down their child's throat until the youngster gets sick. They call the doctor and try to describe what they see inside, but they have no means of making a comparison because they never looked at the child's throat when he or she was healthy. By examining what's normal, we begin to recognize and identify what's abnormal.

Even in a single encounter with someone, you should attempt to note

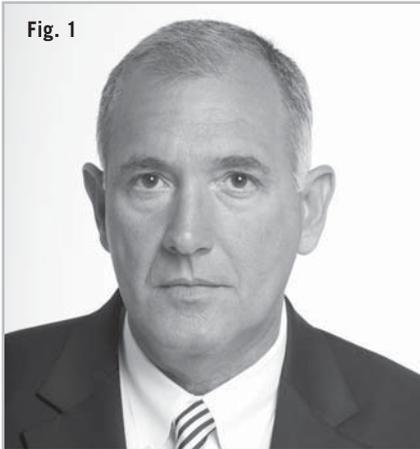


Fig. 1

Note features of face when not stressed. Eyes are relaxed and the lips should be full.

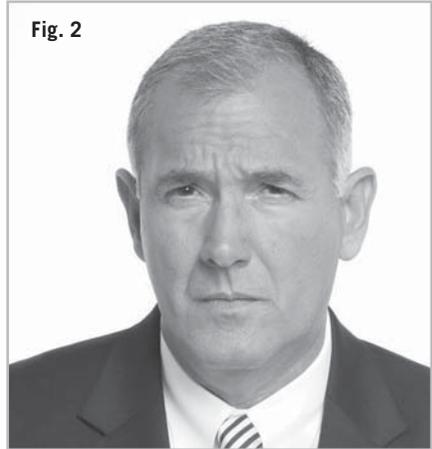


Fig. 2

A stressed face is tense and slightly contorted, eyebrows are knitted, and the forehead is furrowed.

his or her “starting position” at the beginning of your interaction. Establishing a person’s baseline behavior is critical because it allows you to determine when he or she deviates from it, which can be very important and informative (see box 5).

Commandment 6: Always try to watch people for multiple tells—behaviors that occur in clusters or in succession. Your accuracy in reading people will be enhanced when you observe *multiple tells*, or clusters of behavior body signals on which to rely. These signals work together like the parts of a jigsaw puzzle. The more pieces of the puzzle you possess, the better your chances of putting them all together and seeing the picture they portray. To illustrate, if I see a business competitor display a pattern of stress behaviors, followed closely by pacifying behaviors, I can be more confident that she is bargaining from a position of weakness.

Commandment 7: It’s important to look for changes in a person’s behavior that can signal changes in thoughts, emotions, interest, or intent. Sudden *changes* in behavior can help reveal how a person is

BOX 5: IT'S A RELATIVE MATTER

Imagine for a moment that you're the parent of an eight-year-old boy who is waiting in line to greet relatives at a large family reunion. As this is a yearly ritual, you have stood with your son on numerous occasions while he waited his turn to say hello to everyone. He has never hesitated to run up and give family members a big hug. However, on this occasion, when it comes time to embrace his Uncle Harry, he stands stiff and frozen in place.

"What's the matter?" you whisper to him, pushing him toward his waiting uncle.

Your son doesn't say anything, but he is very reluctant to respond to your physical signal.

What should you do? The important thing to note here is that your son's behavior is a deviation from his baseline behavior. In the past, he has never hesitated to greet his uncle with a hug. Why the change in behavior? His "freeze" response suggests he feels threatened or something negative. Perhaps there is no justified reason for his fear, but to the observant and sensibly cautious parent, a warning signal should go off. Your son's deviation from his previous behavior suggests that something negative might have occurred between him and his uncle since their last meeting. Perhaps it was a simple disagreement, the awkwardness of youth, or a reaction to the uncle's preferential treatment of others. Then again, this behavior might indicate something much more sinister. The point is that a change in a person's baseline behavior suggests that something might be amiss and, in this particular case, probably warrants further attention.

processing information or adapting to emotional events. A child who is exhibiting giddiness and delight at the prospect of entering a theme park will change his behavior immediately upon learning the park is closed. Adults are no different. When we get bad news over the phone or see something that can hurt us, our bodies reflect that change immediately.

Changes in a person's behavior can also reveal his or her interest or intentions in certain circumstances. Careful observation of such changes can allow you to predict things before they happen, clearly giving you an advantage—particularly if the impending action could cause harm to you or others (see box 6).

Commandment 8: Learning to detect false or misleading nonverbal signals is also critical. The ability to differentiate between authentic and *misleading cues* takes practice and experience. It requires not only concerted observation, but also some careful judgment. In the chapters to come, I will teach you the subtle differences in a person's actions that reveal whether a behavior is honest or dishonest, increasing your chances of getting an accurate read on the person with whom you are dealing.

Commandment 9: Knowing how to distinguish between comfort and discomfort will help you to focus on the most important behaviors for decoding nonverbal communications. Having studied nonverbal behavior most of my adult life, I have come to realize that there are two principal things we should look for and focus on: *comfort* and *discomfort*. This is fundamental to how I teach nonverbal communications. Learning to read comfort and discomfort cues (behaviors) in others accurately will help you to decipher what their bodies and minds are truly saying. If in doubt as to what a behavior means, ask yourself if this looks like a comfort behavior (e.g., contentment, happiness, relaxation) or if it looks like a discomfort behavior (e.g., displeasure, unhappiness, stress, anxiety, tension). Most of the time you will be able to place observed behaviors in one of these two domains (comfort vs. discomfort).

BOX 6: A NOSE FOR TROUBLE

Among the most important nonverbal clues to a person's thoughts are changes in body language that constitute *intention cues*. These are behaviors that reveal what a person is about to do and provide the competent observer with extra time to prepare for the anticipated action before it takes place.

One personal example of how critical it is to watch for changes in people's behavior—particularly when the changes involve intention cues—involves an attempted robbery of a store where I worked. In this particular situation, I noticed a man standing near the cash register at the checkout counter, a behavior that caught my attention because he seemed to have no reason to be there; he wasn't waiting in line and he hadn't purchased any items. Moreover, the entire time he stood there, his eyes were fixed on the cash register.

If he had just remained quietly where he was, I eventually would have lost interest in him and focused my attention elsewhere. However, while I was still observing him, his behavior changed. Specifically, his nostrils started flaring (nasal wing dilation), which was a giveaway that he was oxygenating in advance of taking some action. I guessed what that action was going to be about a second before it occurred. And a second was all I had to sound a warning. I yelled to the cashier, "Watch out!" as three things happened at once: (a) the clerk finished ringing up a sale, causing the cash drawer to open; (b) the man near the register lunged forward, plunging his hand into the drawer to grab some cash; and (c) alerted by my shouted warning, the cashier grabbed the man's hand and twisted it, causing the would-be robber to drop the money and run out of the store. Had I not spotted his intention cue, I am sure the thief would have succeeded in his efforts. Incidentally, the cashier was my father, who was running a small hardware store in Miami back in 1974. I was his summer hire.

Commandment 10: When observing others, be subtle about it.

Using nonverbal behavior requires you to observe people carefully and decode their nonverbal behaviors accurately. However, one thing you *don't* want to do when observing others is to make your intentions obvious. Many individuals tend to stare at people when they first try to spot nonverbal cues. Such intrusive observation is not advisable. Your ideal goal is to observe others without their knowing it, in other words, unobtrusively.

Work at perfecting your observational skills, and you will reach a point where your efforts will be both successful *and* subtle. It's all a matter of practice and persistence.

You have now been introduced to your part of our partnership, the ten commandments you need to follow to decode nonverbal communication successfully. The question now becomes "What nonverbal behaviors should I be looking for, and what important information do they reveal?" This is where I come in.

Identifying Important Nonverbal Behaviors and Their Meanings

Consider this. The human body is capable of giving off literally thousands of nonverbal "signals" or messages. Which ones are most important and how do you decode them? The problem is that it could take a lifetime of painstaking observation, evaluation, and validation to identify and interpret important nonverbal communications accurately. Fortunately, with the help of some very gifted researchers and my practical experience as an FBI expert on nonverbal behavior, we can take a more direct approach to get you on your way. I have already identified those nonverbal behaviors that are most important, so you can put this unique knowledge to immediate use. We have also developed a paradigm or model that makes reading nonverbals easier. Even if you forget exactly what a specific body signal means, you will still be able to decipher it.

As you read through these pages, you will learn certain information about nonverbal behavior that has never been revealed in any other text

on body language (including examples of nonverbal behavioral clues used to solve actual FBI cases). Some of the material will surprise you. For example, if you had to choose the most “honest” part of a person’s body—the part that would most likely reveal an individual’s *true* feeling or intentions—which part would you select? Take a guess. Once I reveal the answer, you’ll know a prime place to look when attempting to decide what a business associate, family member, date, or total stranger is thinking, feeling, or intending. I will also explain the physiological basis for nonverbal behavior, the role the brain plays in nonverbal behavior. I will also reveal the truth about detecting deception as no counterintelligence agent has done before.

I firmly believe that understanding the biological basis for body language will help you appreciate how nonverbal behavior works and why it is such a potent predictor of human thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Therefore, I start the next chapter with a look at that magnificent organ, the human brain, and show how it governs every facet of our body language. Before I do so, however, I will share an observation concerning the validity of using body language to understand and assess human behavior.

FOR WHOM THE TELLS TOLL

On a fateful date in 1963, in Cleveland, Ohio, thirty-nine-year veteran Detective Martin McFadden watched two men walk back and forth in front of a store window. They took turns peeking into the shop and then walking away. After multiple passes, the two men huddled at the end of the street looking over their shoulders as they spoke to a third person. Concerned that the men were “casing” the business and intending to rob the store, the detective moved in, patted down one of the men, and found a concealed handgun. Detective McFadden arrested the three men, thus thwarting a robbery and averting potential loss of life.

Officer McFadden’s detailed observations became the basis for a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Terry v. Ohio*, 1968, 392 U.S. 1)

known to every police officer in the United States. Since 1968, this ruling has allowed police officers to stop and frisk individuals without a warrant when their behaviors telegraph their intention to commit a crime. With this decision, the Supreme Court acknowledged that nonverbal behaviors presage criminality if those behaviors are observed and decoded properly. *Terry v. Ohio* provided a clear demonstration of the relationship between our thoughts, intentions, and nonverbal behaviors. Most important, this decision provided *legal recognition* that such a relationship exists and is valid (Navarro & Schafer, 2003, 22–24).

So the next time someone says to you that nonverbal behavior does not have meaning or is not reliable, remember this case, as it says otherwise and has stood the test of time.

TWO

Living Our Limbic Legacy

Take a moment and bite your lip. Really, take a second and actually do it. Now, rub your forehead. Finally, stroke the back of your neck. These are things we do all the time. Spend some time around other people and you'll see them engaging in these behaviors on a regular basis.

Do you ever wonder *why* they do it? Do you ever wonder why *you* do it? The answer can be found hidden away in a vault—the *cranial vault*—where the human brain resides. Once we learn why and how our brain recruits our body to express its emotions nonverbally, we'll also discover how to interpret these behaviors. So, let's take a closer look inside that vault and examine the most amazing three pounds of matter found in the human body.

Most people think of themselves as having one brain and recognize that brain as the seat of their cognitive abilities. In reality, there are three

“brains” inside the human skull, each performing specialized functions that work together as the “command-and-control center” that regulates everything our body does. Back in 1952, a pioneering scientist named Paul MacLean began to speak of the human brain as a *triune brain* consisting of a “reptilian (stem) brain,” “mammalian (limbic) brain,” and “human (neocortex) brain” (see diagram of the limbic brain). In this book, we will be concentrating on the limbic system of the brain (the part MacLean called the mammalian brain), because it plays the largest role in the expression of our nonverbal behavior. However, we will use our neocortex (our human brain or thinking brain) to analyze critically the limbic reactions of those around us in order to decode what other people are thinking, feeling, or intending (LeDoux, 1996, 184–189; Goleman, 1995, 10–21).

It is critical to understand that the brain controls all behaviors, whether conscious or subconscious. This premise is the cornerstone of understanding all nonverbal communications. From simply scratching your head to composing a symphony, there is nothing you do (except for some involuntary muscle reflexes) that is not governed or directed by the brain. By this

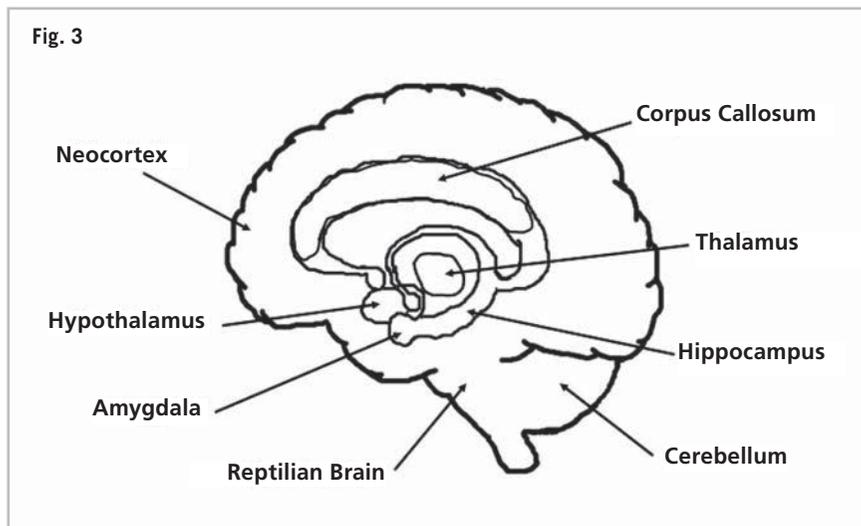


Diagram of the limbic brain with major features such as the amygdala and the hippocampus.

logic, we can use these behaviors to interpret what the brain is choosing to communicate externally.

THE VERY ELEGANT LIMBIC BRAIN

In our study of nonverbal communications, the limbic brain is where the action is. Why? Because it is the part of the brain that reacts to the world around us reflexively and instantaneously, in real time, and without thought. For that reason, it gives off a *true* response to information coming in from the environment (Myers, 1993, 35–39). Because it is uniquely responsible for our survival, the limbic brain does not take breaks. It is always “on.” The limbic brain is also our emotional center. It is from there that signals go out to various other parts of the brain, which in turn orchestrate our behaviors as they relate to emotions or our survival (LeDoux, 1996, 104–137). These behaviors can be observed and decoded as they manifest physically in our feet, torso, arms, hands, and faces. Since these reactions occur without thought, unlike words, they are genuine. Thus, the limbic brain is considered the “honest brain” when we think of nonverbals (Goleman, 1995, 13–29).

These limbic survival responses go back not only to our own infancy, but also to our ancestry as a human species. They are hardwired into our nervous system, making them difficult to disguise or eliminate—like trying to suppress a startle response even when we anticipate a loud noise. Therefore, it is axiomatic that limbic behaviors are honest and reliable behaviors; they are true manifestations of our thoughts, feelings, and intentions (see box 7).

The third part of our brain is a relatively recent addition to the cranial vault. Thus it is called the *neocortex*, meaning new brain. This part of our brain is also known as the “human,” “thinking,” or “intellectual” brain, because it is responsible for higher-order cognition and memory. This is the part of the brain that distinguishes us from other mammals due to the large amount of its mass (cortex) used for thinking. This is the brain that got us to the moon. With its ability to compute, analyze,

BOX 7: HEAD-ING OFF A BOMBER

Since the limbic part of our brain cannot be cognitively regulated, the behaviors it generates should be given greater importance when interpreting nonverbal communications. You can use your thoughts to try to disguise your true emotions all you want, but the limbic system will self-regulate and give off clues. Observing these alarm reactions and knowing that they are honest and significant is extremely important; it can even save lives.

An example of this occurred in December of 1999, when an alert U.S. customs officer thwarted a terrorist who came to be known as the “millennial bomber.” Noting the nervousness and excessive sweating of Ahmed Reesam as he entered the United States from Canada, Officer Diana Dean asked him to step out of his car for further questioning. At that point Reesam attempted to flee but was soon captured. In his car, officers found explosives and timing devices. Reesam was eventually convicted of plotting to bomb the Los Angeles Airport.

The nervousness and sweating that Officer Dean observed were regulated in the brain as a response to immense stress. Because these limbic behaviors are genuine, Officer Dean could be confident in pursuing Reesam, with the knowledge that her observations had detected body language that justified further investigation. The Reesam affair illustrates how one’s psychological state manifests nonverbally in the body. In this case, the limbic system of a would-be bomber—who was obviously extremely frightened by the possibility of being detected—gave away his nervousness, despite all conscious attempts he made to hide his underlying emotions. We owe Officer Dean our gratitude for being an astute observer of nonverbal behavior and foiling a terrorist act.