

Non-Verbal Signs That Say I'm The Boss

The man in the photograph is leaning back in his chair, fingers laced behind his head, one foot on his desk.

"What do you think he is communicating?" I ask a group of management communications students. To many of the students, the man appears **casual** and **relaxed**.

In fact, he is communicating **superiority**. The foot on the desk conveys ownership or **territoriality**.

If this man is not the boss, he is someone his co-workers need to watch out for, say Gerald I. Nierenberg and Henry H. Calero, authors of the popular *How to Read a Person Like a Book*.

Nierenberg and Calero studied the meaning of non-verbal communication in business and found many gestures that appear on the surface to be casual are in fact signs of **dominance** and **aggression**.

Such gestures also include straddling a chair or sitting with one leg over the arm of a chair.

If this seems far-fetched, you may want to ask yourself who appears casual in your workplace.

Is it the boss? A co-worker who seems to rub people the wrong way? A junior employee who likes to challenge authority?

If a junior employee uses such gestures it may be only when the boss isn't around. If the boss happens by, the employee may "snap to attention".

Notice the non-verbal communication in your workplace, but don't assume from a single gesture that someone is communicating dominance or aggression.

A particular gesture may be a **habit** or may have an entirely different meaning for the person making it.

Watch for clusters (a group) of gestures that communicate a similar message, and notice the circumstances in which they are used.

Does someone adopt dominance gestures during a negotiation or in the presence of certain people? If so, those gestures may be more than just a habit.

Should you use dominance gestures yourself? In a negotiation, such gestures may help to convey that you are confident.

However, if you would not verbally challenge your boss or someone else in a position of authority, you should not challenge them non-verbally either unless you are prepared to face the consequences.

by Tag Goulet

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