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When gestures have meaning ...

Here's one of those "surprises" that came in from the folks at Wiley (helllooo, FTC). When this first came in, I was thinking "what am I supposed to do with that?", but because it was relatively short, and I'd hit a snag on another project (you'll hear about that eventually), I decided to slot it into my reading a week or so back. I was very happy that I did!

As long-time readers of my main blog space will recall, I used to be fairly active with my local Toastmasters group (before taking that job in Evanston in 2007). One of the things that seemed to be a challenge to even the most accomplished speakers, though, was body movement, and especially congruent body motions which enhanced your message delivery. Well, Sharon Sayler's *What Your Body Says (And How to Master the Message): Inspire, Influence, Build Trust, and Create Lasting Business Relationships* (a remarkably bulky title for a book that runs only about 180 pages!) should definitely be on their reading list, as by following her basic set of instructions, most (especially new) speakers would have their presentations greatly improved.

Now, I have to confess that I have not tried practicing or implementing the suggestions in this book, but the general focus and direction of the material seems fairly plausible (I also have no idea how this might run counter or redundant to other "body language" books out there). However, the approach seems both reasonable and not particularly difficult to add to one's repertoire.

While there is quite a lot of material about how to "work a stage" in here, this is by no means a book "about public speaking", as a lot of it is targeted to small presentations, intimate groups, and even one-on-one situations. The main thrust here is to develop body language habits (primarily in the "what do I do with my hands?" ballpark) that will allow congruent messages in one's physical presence to match what one is saying. I don't know about you, but I am frequently taken aback when I see figures on TV who are clearly giving out two (or more) messages, and being able to avoid that in my own communications sort of hooked me on this book!

As I noted above, this is a fairly thin volume, and a non-negligible amount of that is involved in diagrams, tables, etc. One might think this would be a negative, but in this case it prevents the author from attempting to be "encyclopedic" and creates a fairly tight focus on hand/arm movements, stances, tone and pacing of voice, and a few other key elements. When one is done reading *What Your Body Says* you will likely feel that you "have a handle on" this basic set of skills, know how to apply them, and are only a bit of practicing away from making their integral to one's communications skill set.

One of the things I found most fascinating here were the issues of timing of gestures, how and why to hold a hand position long, how to disassociate oneself with bad news, how to "change subjects" with motions, and similar practices. Here's a snippet on a related subject:

A verbal message has two parts: the actual spoken word and the silent pause between the segments, sentences, and thoughts. The silent pause allow the speaker to breathe. A silent, gestured pause allows the speaker to breathe and emphasize key parts of the message. Holding a gesture still (keep the same gesture, do not move it) throughout the pause allows the listener's mind to see, feel, interpret, and internalize the message, which adds more impact to the verbal message.



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The first part of the book discusses the concept of "signals", what they are, how they work, why they influence one's audience, etc. This then moves into several chapters on types of gestures, "Gestures of Relationship", "Gestures of Location", "Gestures That Teach", and "Gestures of Expectation and Influence", each of which is broken down into sub-sections on specific elements of these general areas. She then covers material about the eyes, and the voice, and then how to pull all the various bits together. Again, this is fairly brief and to-the-point, so there's lots of things condensed into this limited space.

This is brand-new (in fact, I just noticed that its official release date is August 2nd), so you should be reasonably successful in finding it at any general-interest local book vendor. Amazon, of course, has it at about 1/3rd off the cover price, which is probably your cheapest option (bizarrely, some of the new/used guys have copies of this already, but many have it priced higher than Amazon does!). If you are a communicator, be it on stage, on video, in meetings, in groups, etc., I suspect that you will find this a very useful book, and if you're in Toastmasters, I think this will likely give your presentations a big jump in effectiveness. Again, it's just me, but I'd not encountered as compact and "easy to implement" guide book on going for body/speech congruency before this, so I'm pretty enthusiastic about it.

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