

LEADERS & SUCCESS

Project Your Best Self

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All of business is a stage, so master your presence. How to earn bravos from your professional audience:

- **Note the diaphragm.** An early lesson for performers? How to properly inhale and exhale. Corporate types should similarly take note. "We breathe too high in our chest and too rapidly," said Sharon Saylor, author of "What Your Body Says."

That quick, shallow pattern mimics the fight-or-flight response, which tips off listeners that you're feeling nervous. For a calming effect, try a slower pace that raises and lowers your abdomen.

- **Slow your reaction.** Don't start beaming the minute you meet someone new. "If we are very quick to smile, it's not sincere-looking," Saylor told IBD.

A gradual grin signals you're thinking, not just reacting.

"It's a way we can look more intelligent," she said. "That smile starts that one-on-one connection."

- **Beware the stare.** "A lot of times we've been taught to use real intense eye contact," Saylor said.

That constant visual connection can feel intimidating in one-on-one situations. Periodically break eye contact by looking off to the side.

- **Use body language.** Gestures can add or detract from what you're saying — so be deliberate about how you incorporate motions into your communication style.

"Charisma can be created. Part of that is understanding the nonverbals," Saylor said. "I do suggest practicing so it becomes a natural part of what you do."

- **Play to your audience.** When men gesture with their palms sideways, Saylor says the message is: "Let's negotiate."

Conversely, women using the same motion means: "I'm not open to further discussion."

To avoid sending or receiving the wrong signal, study up on the nuances of nonverbal communication.

- **Polish that costume.** When it comes to business attire, 'work casual' doesn't mean 'work careless.' So says Anna Wildermuth, personal imaging consultant and "Change One Thing" author.

"The thing about casual clothes is they fade faster and they wear faster," Wildermuth said. "It's the maintenance and the care of the clothes that really send a message."

- **Pump yourself up.** Going into a key meeting? Don't let anything — including a tough economy — dampen your delivery.

"Attitude is everything," Wildermuth said. "People want to be with people who are upbeat."

- **Get into character.** Meeting with a potential employer or client for the first time? Read that firm's Web site. That's the advice of "The Art of Business Seduction" author Mark Jeffries.

"Look at some of the phrases they use," he said. Then drop a key word or expression from that site into your conversation.

But don't go overboard. "It has to be subtle," Jeffries said.

The point is to make your audience feel you're one of them.

"We're very tribal in the way we coexist, and business is no exception," he said.

- **Check crowd response.** Is your audience tuned in? Jeffries watches for nods per minute, or NPM. Seven or eight mean they're interested.

"If you notice in conversation that the nodding stops ... you have to change subjects," Jeffries said.

- **Exit stage left.** Comedians know to leave on a big laugh. It's the same in business. "When it's going well, don't oversell," Jeffries said.