

The Eyes Have It

by Cathy C. Bonczek

Cathy:

To be a communicator, or a great leader, one of the most important skills to master is eye contact. We work with clients on all the delivery skills, including the voice, movement, and gestures that accompany every presentation, but in my book, one should always start by improving one's eye contact. Why? Because the rewards of eye contact are so plentiful.

We've all heard the saying that the eyes are the window to the soul. More than that, good eye contact can help you make a positive impression, improve rapport and learn more than others.

Making a positive impression: When someone gives you appropriate eye contact for the right length of time, you will give them the benefit of believing them to be:

Honest, Intelligent, Kind, Attentive, Connected, Credible, Confident, Charismatic

And more...

Poor eye contact can give the impression that the speaker is uncomfortable, dishonest, disconnected, or even disdainful. This is not the way we want our clients to see us. Why risk all those negative impressions, when you can train yourself to master eye contact?

Improving rapport: If you observe your listener carefully, you can assess their comfort with eye contact. Their micro-expressions, or a tightening of the facial muscles might indicate tension. If they move their eyes away from your gaze, they are no longer comfortable. Taking their cue to graciously avert your own gaze, then gently swing back to eye contact after a moment or two, is a way of building non-verbal rapport. If the client is enjoying your eye contact, they will feel heard, respected and admired. It is likely they will share more with you, as a result.

Learn more than others: Another positive result of making eye contact is that you will be paying close attention to your counterpart. This will enhance your listening. You may well hear something that might otherwise have been missed. Or you might see the flicker of a facial reaction to something that's been said – these observed moments not only give you insight into the other person, they give you a reason to interject or react.

Tahra observes:

Many of you know, I used to work for the corporate offices of Blue Man Group. One of the most interesting casting facts about becoming a Blue Man is less than 2% of the auditioners will become a Blue Man. And, it's not musical talent that is the determining factor to get casted. The key criteria is the ability to speak solely through your eyes. Mark Frankel, a trainer of Blue Men and a Blue Man, himself, says it best: "From the stage, I become an active participant in their (the audience's) lives, at least for this fleeting moment. It reminds me that in anything we do, interaction with one another, in some form, is at its core, driving us." **Eye contact is connection. Connection is powerful in communication.**

Cathy:

Try thinking about eye contact as a tool you can wield. Don't worry if this is something you struggle with now – you will get better with practice. There are many ways you can improve your eye contact.

CONTACT US if you'd like a short list of eye contact exercises. We'll be seeing you...

