

Dynamic Postures for Public Speaking

How to use body language to keep your audience engaged and wanting for more

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Research shows that in face to face communication, body language makes up more than half the meaning of your communication. Your audience searches your body language for visual cues of meaning, such as your enthusiasm, credibility and emotions behind your message. A speaker who does not change his energy state often will be visually and vocally monotonous to his audience. In this article, you will learn about a new way of looking at and harnessing the potential of body language to engage your audience dynamically.

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Dynamic Postures are energy states

During a presentation, presenters usually adopt one of four main body language archetypes, which I call Dynamic Postures. In essence they represent four different energy states of the speaker. Adopting a particular Posture distinctively *activates a set of gestures, movements, expressions and vocal variety through a change in physiology*. The four Dynamic Postures are: Thinker, Warrior, Lover and Child. Each of this posture has its own energy state. You would stand, move, breathe, look and speak to the audience differently for each set of posture. Each will impact the audience differently. All of us have a preferred dominant posture, which we tend to use the most of, which then defines our speaking style. We will explore each one in turn. Along the way, I invite you to pause and reflect upon your own speaking style and determine which your preferred posture is.

Thinker (energy state: intellectual)

Imagine a college professor conducting a lecture giving you lots of facts. This imagery typifies the Thinker posture: Logical (conveying facts) rather than Emotional (expressing feelings), Calm (lower energy) rather than Excitable (higher energy), Passive (fixated at one spot having a monologue) rather than Active (physically reaching out into the audience space and having a heightened conversation with them).

Most of us would have come across such a presenter who logically gives us the facts, presents it at a low energy manner and stays within his own defined spatial zone rather than actively reaching over to the audience's physical space and interacting with them. In summary, the Thinker's energy is very intellectual, and he speaks from the head rather than from the heart.

The advantage of speaking from this posture is that it projects credibility and portrays you as the subject matter expert. The disadvantage is that it is easily overused by most business and technical presenters, resulting in a highly factual, but monotonous, uninteresting and unimpactful experience for your audience.

Warrior (energy state: intense)

Visualize a Maori warrior performing the Haka dance. I am sure you will agree with me it is an intense and captivating experience, both to perform and to watch. He is totally immersed in action, highly emotional and excitable. This imagery typifies the Warrior posture: Emotional (expressing feelings) rather than Logical (conveying facts), Excitable (high energy) rather than Calm (low energy), Active rather than Passive.

A speaker adopting a Warrior posture speaks at a heightened volume, is entirely passionate about his topic, goes straight to the point and does not shy away from challenging your beliefs in a direct way. Can you identify someone who speaks like that?

This is the most powerful of the postures. The advantage of speaking from this posture is that it projects passion, energy and conviction as well as forcefulness. It demonstrates power and decisiveness. It is unequivocal. The audience knows where you stand on an issue, and where you want them to stand on it. The disadvantage is that it can come across as too strong to an audience. If not careful, it can be perceived as being overly aggressive and confrontational.

Lover (energy state: nurturing)

I am referring to the broad definition of love for all humanity—universal, unconditional and non-judgmental. It is all embracing. Think of Mother Theresa, for whom these qualities came to be embodied.

A speaker in a Lover posture would express feelings of empathy and compassion, demonstrates composure and is somewhat passive. As a result, the speaker is likely to be soft spoken and moves slowly.

The advantage of speaking from this posture is that it shows care and concern for the audience. It is non-confrontational and has a calming effect on everyone. It embraces diversity, is forgiving and provides a spiritual sanctuary for weary souls to take shelter from the competitive world outside. The disadvantage is that it can be perceived as too soft, lacking in confidence and energy, especially when adopted by someone of lesser seniority in an organization.

Child (energy state: creative)

Imagine a happy child having a good time. This is the most playful of the postures. It is highly energetic, expressive in feelings and active.

A speaker in a Child posture would be telling amusing stories, sharing a joke and bantering with the audience. It is characterized by fun and a sense of playfulness.

The advantage of speaking from this posture is that it is energizing and entertaining for the audience. The disadvantage is that it can be perceived as not being serious enough and could harm the perception of your credibility if not used appropriately.

Application

As you can tell, each posture has its own pros and cons. The danger is in overusing your dominant posture because it is the most natural for you. The result will be monotony and audience fatigue. The key is to strategically use different postures at different parts of your presentation. Dynamic speakers use this strategy. This approach will enliven your presentation and keep you audience riveted to their seats. For e.g., when presenting new information, use the Thinker posture for credibility. Adopt the Child posture to bring in humorous stories that illustrate the point. Use creative techniques to help your audience remember the key facts. Demonstrate empathy with the audience through the Lover posture. Use the Warrior posture to challenge their thinking. When you cycle through the four postures, you generate visual variety and can be assured of an effective and dynamic presentation that your engaged audience will remember for a long time to come.