

Boost Your Body Language

Summary notes taken from the Referee Magazine Leadership Guide:

If you were asked what is the most important aspect of being a successful official, what would you come up with? Positioning? Solid judgment? Superior physical conditioning?

According to numerous sources, including Dale Carnegie and Brian Tracy, 85 percent of your success in nearly every area of your life has to do with how well you communicate with others. No if that is true, what is the largest part of communication? The words we say? How we say them?

Again, according to those sources, a massive 55 percent of communication is body language.

As an official, it is nice to know those statistics. Think of the advantage that gives us. It means that, by boosting your body language, you can command more of a presence on the field/court/mat, gain the credibility you need to successfully officiate a game and be instantly recognized as being competent and effective. In short, you can become a better official simply by using the power of the unspoken word.

In an audio program entitled, “The Best-Kept Secrets of Great Communicators,” narrator Peter Thompson explains that body language is one of the nine best-kept secrets of the world’s greatest communicators. It is an indispensable, priceless skill to acquire – the skill of influencing others with not just our words, but with our body language.

The best way to illustrate the effectiveness of body language can be found in man’s best friend: the dog. From the wag of his tail, to the big, puppy-dog eyes he gives us when we say the word “walk,” a dog can only use body language to communicate. So how can we apply body language to the games we work?

APPEARANCE – The more you look like an official, the more credibility you will receive. Think about the difference between an amateur official and a professional official. Quite often, the professional keeps every part of his or her uniform spotless. He or she cannot risk a loss of respect for something as silly as a stain on the shirt or a scuff on the shoes. Ask yourself: “Is it time for a refreshing change of wardrobe?” You will be amazed at how different you feel after improving your look. And it does not cost much to do so. Something as simple as a change of laces can make a big difference in your appearance.

POSTURE – A good, upright posture is perhaps the easiest way to appear more confident. How easy is it to look at an official and notice a lack of confidence just from his or her posture? It is easy to feel unconfident at certain times in a game. The best officials in the world, however, have learned that you must “fake” confidence before it will come to you. And the best way to do that is to work on your posture. Get your shoulders back, look up. Plant your

feet when the time is called for. And almost immediately you will feel a sense of control and confidence.

SIGNALS – You can never practice signals in the mirror enough. A good, crisp, clean signal exudes so much confidence. As the only way to actively communicate with everybody in the venue, signals should be given special attention. But it is also possible to be too perfect – you will come across as too robotic. There is nothing wrong with making the perfect signal, but you do have some room to adapt your signals to match your personality and the atmosphere of the game. Something as simple as the signals you use can give you the credibility you seek.

EYE CONTACT – During those times when you need to explain a ruling to a player or coach, you must be prepared to make eye contact at all times during the conversation. If a coach has a genuine concern, the best way to listen is to focus 100 percent on what is being said. You cannot do this without making direct eye contact with him or her. That, yet again, is an excellent way of gaining more credibility and rapport.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS – The look on your face is another area that can help improve body language. However, it is an area that can also get you in trouble. I was once berated for winking at a coach letting him know I got his point...it was misinterpreted as a flippant act and not a professional application to the game/craft. Whether correct or not, it makes the clear point that even the slightest facial expression can irk any game participant. Use your facial expressions to lighten the mood of a contest, but do so with care. Use your facial expressions to exert your authority, but not bully.

Finally, imagine how good you will feel after practicing those suggestions. No matter how many years you have been officiating, it never hurts to improve in the one area – the largest area – that can separate the good from the great.