



The Link Between Physical and Emotional States

I was recently working with a client who was expressing his discomfort with his recent conversations with his clients. My client is a friendly, relaxed person and so I was surprised that he was feeling anxious about his client engagements. When we role played a recent client meeting I noticed that he had adopted a different posture to his normal seating position. We soon concluded that he needed to return to his normal friendly posture if he was to feel his normal friendly self. Not everybody accepts this link between physiology and emotional state so I thought I might explore the potential impact that your physical position may have on the quality of your communication...

I understand that there may be some scepticism about this topic and there is some difficulty in testing it because it relies on your self-awareness of your emotional state. Hence, as a starting point, you will need to be conscious of your feelings when you are communicating – something that does not come easy for everyone. Let's consider an example:

Suppose that you are called upon to address the Board of Directors of your organisation. In this example, let's assume that you would like to feel confident and self-assured when you present to them. Let's also imagine that last time, on reflection, you felt nervous and uneasy when you answered their questions. Now, for this purpose, forget about the actual questions and answers, and think back to your physiology at the Board Meeting. Let's say that you recall that you were sitting at the Board table when you were answering their questions. You remember feeling uneasy that questions seemed to come from all directions and that you felt that you lacked authority in your responses. Now think about occasions when you have felt confident when speaking (and again forget about the subject matter). If you were standing up at those times then I suggest that you adopt your preferred, confident physical state (ie standing) when you next address the Board. You may need to seek permission or explain why you would prefer to stand if you are expected to sit. But isn't it better to try something different if you want a different result?

Now I am not saying that it is better to stand than sit. I could have presented a different scenario.... Imagine that last time you felt uneasy standing up in front of the Board. You felt exposed, you were nervous about your hands and some of your notes were left on the table. Perhaps you usually feel more confident when seated at a meeting, on the same level (physically) as the other people and with all of your notes ordered carefully around you. In that case it would make a lot of sense to remain seated at your next Board presentation if you really want to feel confident and self-assured. Again, you may need to seek permission but I'm sure that you can happily explain why.



Physiology is not just about sitting or standing and it is often more subtle. It's not about making judgements regarding body language but recognising that different physiology works for different people. So my key messages today:

- There is a link, often strong (albeit subconscious), between physical state and emotional state
- Become more conscious of how you are feeling when you are communicating and, if you don't like how you are feeling, reflect on your physiology
- If you want to change how you are feeling, you might begin by changing your physical state.
- There is no right physiology or wrong physiology – it's what works for you

The corollary is particularly interesting. If we don't like the emotional state of someone we are communicating with we could attempt to change how they feel by changing their physiology. I will pursue that concept in another article.

It requires a different mindset to be aware of our emotional state when we are communicating – and to be flexible enough to impact that emotional state by changing our physical state.