

Subconscious behaviour

Have you ever found yourself doing something without even realising it was happening?

We all do many things without any conscious input. Some of these are just part of being alive (breathing, maintaining our balance as we move, scratching an itch). And some come from habits that we have developed (biting our finger nails, rolling our eyes when someone says something we don't agree with, sniffing repeatedly, tapping or drumming our fingers, talking to ourselves).

Whether it is about 'body functions', or about habits, according to some research, up to 95% of our behaviour is controlled by our subconscious mind. While none of the above habits are likely to be life-threatening, any or all of them can become irritating to others around us. And that is the catch here – we can be doing something without even realising it. But while we are completely oblivious to what we are doing, we may well be damaging our reputation, i.e. our **brand**.

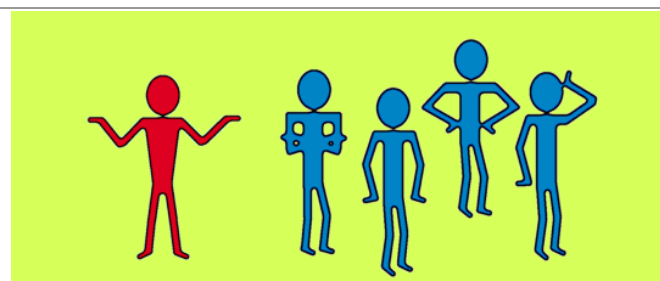
Our personal brand

In everything we do, our **personal brand** governs our success, especially amongst our connections and our colleagues. In this highly connected world, our **personal brand** can be the key that gives someone a reason to connect with us, to buy from us, to hire or employ us, to promote us. At best our subconscious habits can be a handicap that has an impact on our potential – at worst our habits can have serious consequences for our prospects. Fair competition is one thing, but we may actually be giving our competitors a flying head start through our subconscious behaviour.

Although our subconscious behaviour comes in many forms, there are three key areas where we can cause 'self-carnage':

- our **body language** – i.e. the silent signals that we all transmit to those who might be observing us
- our **speech** – i.e. the impression we create when we are speaking, whether one-on-one or in a group
- our '**social decorum**' – this is about how we conduct ourselves in an informal setting (such as at a café)

Any one of these areas can cause us considerable grief if we are not careful – let's examine each in turn.



Don't let Subconscious Behaviour damage your Brand

"What did I do?" you ask, as everyone around you quietly moves away. Our subconscious behaviours – especially some of the habits we have developed – can cause problems without us even being aware of what we are doing.

Body language

Displays of body language are a natural and largely subconscious part of who we are. Before we even speak a word, our body language is 'broadcasting' messages to anyone who cares to take notice. This is known as 'non-verbal' communication. For most of us, unless we are consciously thinking about our body language, nature will prevail and our body will reflect clues to our mental attitude (i.e. feelings*, emotions* and intentions).

* Feelings are our external demonstration of our emotions; emotions are our internal reactions to things that happen to us.

Three aspects of body language to consider are (a) our personal confidence; (b) our connection to someone; and (c) possible cultural faux pas.

- **Personal confidence:** body language that quickly reveals our state of **personal confidence** includes our posture, and our eye contact:
 - as a rule, an upright posture indicates **personal confidence**, whereas a hunched or slouched posture suggests a **lack of self confidence** – this applies whether standing, walking, or sitting
 - readiness to make eye contact is usually an indication of **personal confidence**, whereas a bowed head or downward gaze suggests a **lack of self confidence** – strong eye contact can imply hostility or a challenge, and staring may be a sign of intense concentration or personal affection
- **Connection:** body language that reflects our **willingness to connect**, or otherwise, with someone includes the positioning of our feet, and body mirroring:
 - feet pointed towards someone usually suggests a **willingness to connect**, while feet pointed away from someone indicates a **desire to leave** – this is most obvious when standing, but can also apply when sitting
 - mirroring of someone else's body position is a definite indicator of a **willingness to connect**
- **Cultural faux pas:** *body language* that can lead to a **cultural faux pas** in this era of globalisation and multicultural workforces includes certain **hand gestures**, and **invasion of personal space**:
 - for certain cultures, a number of commonly accepted **hand gestures** can cause offence – even things like the traditional 'thumbs up' and

'ok' signs; note also that for some cultures, the *left hand* is considered to be unclean

- the need for **personal space** is something that varies across cultures, and also within cultures – people who are used to public areas where crowding is common will generally accept a smaller amount of personal space; note that personal space also includes touching

Speech

When we are speaking, there is a message in what we say, and there is also a message in how we say it. In particular, our speech can reveal something about our emotions and about our level of **personal confidence** (or **lack of self confidence**); it can also reveal something about our nationality (i.e. our accent/dialect) and possibly about our education (e.g. our vocabulary).

Three aspects of speech to consider are (a) our rate of speech; (b) our use of 'filler' words; and (c) echoing words.

- **Rate of speech:** our rate of speech (words per minute – wpm) can be affected by our emotions, particularly if we are nervous or excited about something. While some people do naturally speak at a fast rate (+180 wpm), when we are nervous or excited, as our rate increases, we are likely to mispronounce or clip words, use filler words, and become monotone. The result is not good for our audience, who have to work hard to understand what is being said.
- **Filler words:** we all use them – *umm, err, ahh, okay, right, you know, so, like* (and more) – they give us time to think while we are speaking, such as when we are answering a question. The problem with filler words is that they can make us appear to lack self confidence, and even to be unprofessional.
- **Echoing words:** we can sometimes fall into the habit of echoing someone else's words – in much that same way as our body language 'mirrors' that

of someone we are talking with. Echoing will usually involve us repeating the same filler words the other person is using – we may also repeat phrases.

Social decorum

I am using the term 'social decorum' to cover how we conduct ourselves in an informal setting (such as at a café). In many parts of the world a lot of business is transacted over a cup of coffee/tea. However, while the setting may be relatively informal, this can be quite hazardous if we do not observe some of the conventions of social decorum.

Three aspects of social decorum to consider are (a) our use of cutlery; (b) our mouth; and (c) seating guidelines.

- **Use of cutlery:** when using western utensils (knife, fork, spoon) there are two different established styles for how to use cutlery – North American and Continental (European); in an informal setting, either should be acceptable. Some commonly observed practices that we should avoid, as they may make us look uncultured and will hurt us professionally, include:
 - *licking the blade of the knife* – I was stunned recently to see an Australian MasterChef host (George Calombaris) licking his knife while tasting a dish, but it turns out that he is a 'serial knife-licker' – NOT a good example to follow if we are trying to impress someone (like a manager or employer)
 - *loading the fork like a shovel* – the act of pushing a large amount of the food into our mouth can be quite ungainly – the result is our mouth is overfilled, making it harder to chew properly
 - *using the teaspoon to collect every bubble of froth from the cup* – given the price for a cup of coffee or chocolate, this is almost understandable – but it is such a bad look, as if

we are desperate to collect and consume every drop and bubble; it is also not likely to impress

- **Our mouth:** when we have food in our mouth, two of the most inelegant acts possible are:
 - *chewing with our mouth open* – this is very common, and it is certainly not a good look
 - *speaking while our mouth is full* – also very common, and also not a good look (plus – it is usually very difficult to understand what is being said)
- **Seating guidelines:** if we are meeting with someone important, and we want to make a good impression, three tips to follow:
 - consider allowing them to choose which seat they want to take – this is about thoughtfulness rather than dominance
 - wait for them to sit down before we do – this is a simple gesture of courtesy (guys, it's OK to hold a seat for a lady)
 - avoid slouching in our seat – rather, keep an upright posture, and '*lean in*' a little; this conveys our attentiveness

Worth a look

Our first free nugget for this Post is the June 2015 Post "[How To Stop Saying Um \(And Other, Like, You Know, Filler Words\)](#)" [approx 4-5 min read] by Carol Lynn Rivera at Web Search Social – Carol Lynn's solution can be adapted to help break many habits, not just speech.

Our second free nugget is the recent Post "[Stop touching me!](#)" [approx 3min read] by James Adonis – James notes how touch can be influential, on either side of the ledger.

Coming next

Voice AND Vocabulary – keys to Your success

<http://freezapnuggets.com/wordpress/?p=1371>