



# Reading the Tells

## Learning How to Read Body Language

Jerry Balistreri  
M.S., M.Ed., ASTD Certified Trainer  
(Copyright 2013)

# Non-Verbal Communication Professional Uses

Are you good a “reading” people?

When in a meeting can you tell who is bored  
or wants to leave?

# Professional Uses

Can you tell if someone is lying or being deceptive?



Koko & All Ball



# Professional Uses

Can you read an interview applicant?

Can you tell if a client is displeased when negotiating a contract?

# Non-Verbal Communication Personal Uses

Do you know what to look for if a date  
is going well?

# Personal Uses

You come home after curfew time and Mom is there to greet you. Can you tell her mood even before she speaks?

# Personal Use

Would you like to know if a person you're about to hire to come into your home to clean, care for an elderly parent, or child is deceptive?

# Personal Use

Would you like to know the next time the car repairman says you need to replace an expensive part?



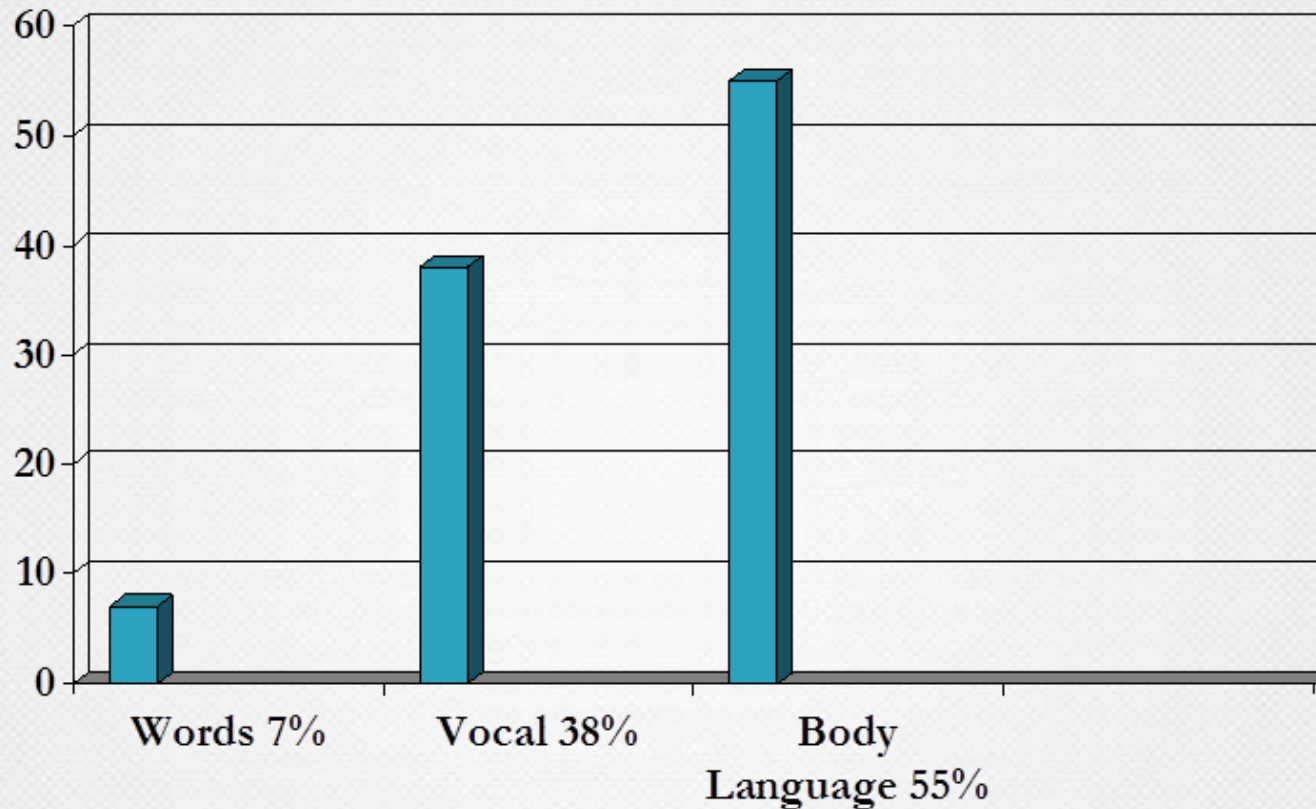
# Objectives

- Develop skills in reading non-verbal “tells”.
- Understand the limbic system and its role in non-verbal communication.
- Dispel the myth of “fight or flight”.
- Identify the most honest part of the body.
- Know how to detect deception.

My Goal

# What Part of the Message ...

Mehrabian, Albert (1971) Silent Message, Wadsworth Publishing co.



# The Limbic System Continued

- It is considered to be the “honest brain” in the non-verbal world (Goleman, 1995, 13-29).
- Consequently it gives off a *true* response to information in the immediate environment.
- Why? It reacts instantaneously, real time, and without thought.
- In the non-verbal world, the limbic brain is where the “action” is. Many, but not all, non-verbal responses come from here.
- The remaining parts of the brain are the thinking and creative parts. These are the non-honest parts of the brain. The brain that can deceive and deceives often (Vrij, 2003, 1-17).

# Limbic Responses

## The Three F's

- The limbic brain has assured our survival as a species because of how it regulates our behavior during times of threat and danger (Navarro, 2008, 25-34).
- The “fight or flight” response to threats and danger is a myth.
- Correct number and sequence is freeze, flight, or fight (Goleman, 1995, 27, 204-207).
- Movement attracts attention. Freezing means survival, it is our first line of defense when threatened. (Columbine, Virginia Tech. & Paducah, KY shootings)
- If the threat is perceived as too close, our second defense is to get out of harms way, or flight. It is distance that gives us comfort.
- The final response, fight, is a last resort tactic. It is survival through aggression. It is a final response as we realize it may bring harm to our own body.

# Freeze & Flight



# Areas To Look For “Tells”

- Face
- Hands & Fingers
- Arms
- Upper Body (chest, shoulders, etc.)
- Lower Body (feet & legs)

# Reid Interrogation Method



# Feet & Leg Non-Verbals

- Top down versus bottom up (scanning)
- When it comes to honesty, it decreases as we move up the body from the feet to the head.
- Why?
- Identifying the most honest part of the body.
- The feet! (Morris, 1985, 244)



# Feet & Leg Non-Verbals

- Bouncing feet – high confidence, happy, elated

# Feet & Leg Non-Verbals

- Bouncing feet – nervous, anxious, stressed

# Feet & Leg Non-Verbals

- Pointing feet – direction of intention
- Toe point – happy, elated (gravity defying)
- Starter position – ready to leave, disengaged
- Leg/foot splay – control, intimidation, threaten, territorial
- Leg crossing (standing) – high comfort
- Leg crossing (seated) – leg direction dictates emotions
- Foot lock w chair – freeze behavior due to nervousness

# Upper Body Non-Verbals (chest, shoulders, & trunk)

- Torso lean (away) – avoidance, dislike, disagreement
- Torso lean (in) – interest, comfort, agreement

# Upper Body Non-Verbals

- Torso bare parts – notice me, make statement, affiliation (tattoos, muscles, etc.)

# Upper Body Non-Verbals

- Torso embellishments – affiliations, denotes purpose, attitude (clothing, badges, emblems, gang dress, etc.)
- Shoulder rise – weakness, insecurity
- Mirroring – comfort

# Arm Non-Verbals

- Arms up – happiness, positive, joy, excitement, praise (gravity defying)
- Withdrawn arms – worried, stressed
- Arms behind back – higher status, not approachable, superiority

# Arm Non-Verbals

- Hooding – territorial, in charge
- Arm/finger splay on table – territorial, confidence, authority
- Folded arms – disapproving, anger, defensive, protecting





# Arm Non-Verbals



# Hand & Finger Non-Verbals

- Covering of the mouth – disbelief, extreme excitement, nervousness

# Hand & Finger Non-Verbals

- Resting face in hands – genuine interest or extreme boredom
- Wringing hands – nervous, anxious, stressed
- Finger point/snapping fingers – negative, rude, offensive
- Tapping fingers – nervousness, tension, boredom
- Hand shake – strength of character
- Clenched fist – determination, hostility, anger
- Thumbs in/out of pocket – low confidence, weakness vs. high confidence, high status
- Stroking and rubbing hands – concern, anxiety, nervousness

# Hand & Finger Non-Verbals

- Suprasternal notch – low confidence, stress reliever, nervousness (women)
- Neck/collar/face touching – low confidence, stress reliever, nervousness (men)

# Face Non-Verbals

- Jaw tightening – tension
- Furrowed forehead (frown) – disagreement, resentful, angry
- Lips tight together – hesitancy, secrecy

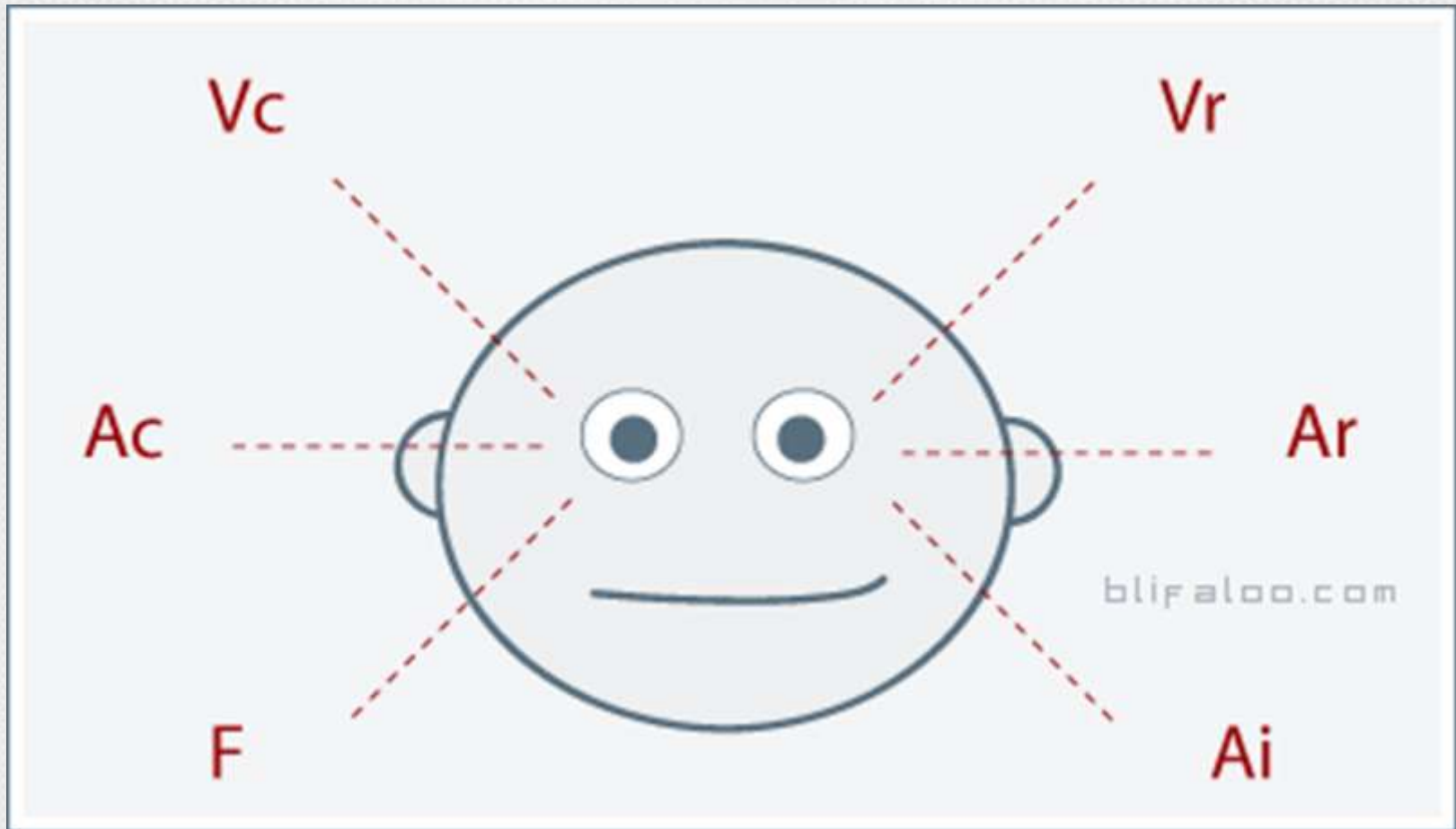
# Face Non-Verbals

- Smile – content, understanding, acceptance, encouraging (fake vs real)
- Direct eye contact – positive messages
- Avoiding direct eye contact – you and your message are no longer important
- Head nod – positive messages (not always agreement)
- Eye squinting – dislike, object to loud noise, sounds, anger
- Biting the lip – nervous, fearful, anxious
- Eye blink increase – troubled, nervousness, suspicious
- Lip licking – nervous, stressed, anxious, looking to pacify

# Detecting Deception

- Deception and/or lying initiates a stress reaction in most people. The stress is fear of being detected or caught. Stress can be further induced via guilt.
- Nervous fingers
- Eye contact shifting
- Rigid and/or defensive posture
- Sweaty palms and/or face
- Variations in pitch, amplitude, and rate of speech
- Abnormal speech hesitation and speech errors (thinking)
- Increased embellishments of story or parts of the story
- Inconsistency in story

# Deception & Eye Direction





# Deception Continued



# Deception Mastered



# Bibliography

- ▶ 2008, *Secrets of Body Language*, History Channel.
- ▶ Blair, J.P., Horvath, F. (1996). *Detecting of Deception Accuracy Using the Verbal Component of the Behavior Analysis Interview Model*, Michigan State University.
- ▶ Cummings, S. (2008) *Mystery at Bootleggers Cove*, Dateline TV, NBC.
- ▶ Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- ▶ Mehrabian, Albert (1971) *Silent Messages*, Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- ▶ Morris, D. (1985) *Body Watching*. New York; Crown Publishers.
- \* Navarro, J. (2008). *What Every Body Is Saying*. Harper Collins Publishers
- ▶ Pearlman, G. (2007). *How To Spot a Liar*, The Palm Beach Times.
- ▶ “The Reid Nine Steps of Interrogation, In Brief.” *Practical Aspects of Interviewing and Interrogation*. John Reid and Associates, Chicago, IL.
- ▶ Varsamis, C. (2005). *How To Detect Liars In Your Business & Personal Life*, Article Alley.
- ▶ Vrij, A. (2003). *Detecting Lies and Deceit*. The psychology of lying and the implications for professional practice. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

# Contact Information

Jerry Balistreri

(907) 346-3466

[balis@acsalaska.net](mailto:balis@acsalaska.net)

[www.readingthetells.com](http://www.readingthetells.com)

I hope we learned something today?