



every  
woman

STEP UP YOUR INFLUENCING  
SKILLS THROUGH BODY  
LANGUAGE AND CLEAR  
COMMUNICATION

# About this workbook

At everywoman, we deliver a range of innovative products and resources that unlock the potential and talent of women in business globally. Whether you're just starting out, looking to progress your career, or even build and develop your own enterprise, the everywomanNetwork provides a wealth of personal development resources, advice and inspiration to address the challenges you face at key stages in business. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to propel you through your life's work, at a time and place that suits you.

*Welcome to our workbook, Step up your influencing skills through body language and clear communication.*

How do your communication skills influence those around you? We tend to think of clear or influential communication as that big speech we give in the weekly meeting, or the polished presentation delivered to the stakeholder group. The reality is that influential communication happens every time you walk into a room - and what you say is often not as important as how you behave.

It is useful to realise that the way we think or feel about a workplace situation can affect how we behave and perform. If you're feeling anxious about a networking event or thinking that your presentation isn't going to live up to everyone's expectations, it will impact on your performance, and ultimately on the clarity of your communication and the power of your influence.

Whatever our role, we are all performers in the workplace. Whether we're presenting a big idea to a whole team of people, or just swapping ideas with a colleague, we are telling the story of who we are and have the chance to influence those around us.

This workbook is for anyone who would like to influence more effectively by harnessing their body language and communication skills to create confidence and positivity. We'll consider three main areas where we can step up our influencing skills: by networking with confidence; by presenting ideas in meetings with more gravitas; or by simply having more productive conversations with colleagues.

The activities in this workbook will help you develop strategies so you can make clear and definite choices about how you think, feel and subsequently behave when communicating with others. Ultimately, they'll help you feel more in control when it comes to your ability to influence others.

We'd love to know how you get on - email us at [karenmax@everywoman.com](mailto:karenmax@everywoman.com) or tweet us @everywomanuk

Max & Karen  
and the everywoman team

# Story telling and how you present yourself to others

## External factors

This comes down to your body language and voice. What is your posture like? What gestures do you use? What about your breathing? What facial expressions do you use when you speak in a meeting or are meeting new people at a networking event?

When we walk into a room, other people immediately notice how we walk, stand, use eye contact and speak. There are all kinds of clues that tell those around us how confident, engaged, or energetic we are.

Often these external factors happen automatically. We all have many physical habits that form over a lifetime and are unique to who we are. But we all have the ability to make more active choices about our body language and how we use our voice, and they can be used to great effect.

## Internal factors

As well as having 'external' body language and vocal habits, we also have many habitual ways of thinking. Sometimes these are positive habits ("I'm really good at leading a team, it's no problem"), but more often than not they may be critical or negative: "I am not confident about speaking in public", "Networking makes me nervous", "I am concerned I will say the wrong thing if I speak up in meetings".

Thoughts like these change the way we feel, and in turn how we behave. If we think critically about ourselves, and feel daunted by networking, presentations or speaking up in important meetings, this can affect our performance.

# Non-verbal techniques from an actor's toolbox

Being a great communicator is something that can be learned and honed with practice just like any other skill. Actors create convincing characters by being aware of physical and vocal habits. This requires thinking about what we do, what effect it has and whether it is getting us the result we want.

Actors are encouraged to treat everything with playfulness and curiosity; both of these are useful when you're focusing on your influencing skills.

We will focus on three different areas: breathing, posture, and the actor's favourite secret weapon... warming up!

Please approach all three parts with a sense of playfulness. Try out the suggestions, and keep asking yourself how they might be most useful and relevant to you.

If possible, I suggest you find a friend or colleague to work with for this exercise. It is helpful to be accountable to someone else when committing to practise something new every day. Your friend can also provide you with a different perspective. Another useful tool is to find people who can give you specific feedback on how you are doing with a particular skill. For example, if you want to come across with more gravitas in your next presentation then see if there is a supportive person in the room who can give you some honest feedback afterwards. Tell them what you are working on and ask them to observe your body language, posture and voice. What worked? What would have made your performance even better?

Let's get started...

# Deep breathing: a vital technique for clear communication

Why does the way we breathe matter? What difference does it make to our communication and influencing skills?

## Managing nerves with a deep breath

Do you ever feel panicky, red-faced, sweaty or that your heart is racing as you get up to speak? You are experiencing your body's response to perceived danger. Your rational thinking can tell you that your life is not actually in danger when you stand up to tell the CEO your fantastic idea, but, in these moments, it's not your rational brain that is in control. When you breathe deeply you can stop this 'flight, fight or freeze' response in its tracks. Breathing deeply into your belly activates your parasympathetic nervous system and therefore quickly relieves your feelings of anxiety. This enables you to operate at your best rather than feeling like a rabbit in the headlights.

## The impact on your voice

As well as calming your nervous system, deep breathing has a dramatic effect on your voice. Actors spend literally hours and hours practising the correct breathing because they know the breath is the foundation of a good strong voice. When you breathe deeply and well, you are enabling your voice to be stronger, deeper, louder, more resonant and have more notes in it. The wider the range of notes we use when we speak, the more energised, passionate and interesting we sound - and the more influence we can have.

## Breathing demonstration

If you have ever learnt how to sing or play a wind instrument or even simply taken a yoga class, you will know all about breathing deep down into your belly. This is referred to as diaphragmatic breathing, belly breathing, abdominal breathing, or simply deep breathing. Follow the steps on the next page to learn how to practise deep breathing and see the effect that it has on your body.

Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest. Now take a long slow breath in. What do you notice? Which hand is moving? Both? Only one of them? If so, which one?



What you are aiming for is deep breathing into your belly.

As I breathe in the hand on my tummy is pushed outwards, and as I breathe out slowly and fully through my mouth, this hand moves inwards.



Imagine you have a balloon in your abdomen. Visualise a tube from your mouth to the balloon. As you breathe in, you are taking air along that tube and inflating the balloon; as you breathe out, you are allowing the balloon to deflate.

Practise this every day until it becomes a habitual way of breathing. You want it to be an easily accessible tool in your toolbox. Breathing in this way is a fast, effective way to manage nerves in any situation. It will slow your heart rate, regulate your physiology and keep your voice strong.

## EXERCISE

- A) Set aside ten minutes every day to practise your deep belly breathing. Lie on the floor, put your hands on your tummy and notice your breath. When you are practising abdominal breathing, you will notice that when you breathe in, your tummy will rise and when you breathe out, your tummy will fall. When you have done this practice for one week you should have really ingrained the habit. Take more time to practise if you need to!
- B) Practise this relaxing empowering belly breathing as regularly as you can. When you're standing on the train, waiting for the kettle to boil, even when you're lying in bed at night or first thing in the morning when you wake up. A few moments of deep belly breathing will make you feel grounded and relaxed, so reap these benefits by making it part of your daily routine!
- C) Use deep breathing as your powerful secret weapon. Whenever you feel nervous or you need your voice to be strong and impactful, go back to that deep breathing. Take a few moments to breathe well just before you speak, and hold onto the deep belly breathing technique whenever you feel under pressure. Don't be afraid to pause and take a good, deep breath before answering that tough question.
- D) Use the space below, or your own journal or notebook, to reflect on what difference this has made to you.

## Takeaway

Make good breathing a habit that you practise whenever you can during the day - even when you are watching TV or walking to the train or bus stop. The more you practise, the better you will feel.

# Posture and body language

We're constantly telling the story of who we are by the way we communicate with our bodies. Our gestures and facial expressions, what we do and the pace at which we do it all provide 55% of the information other people need in order to decide if they like, trust and believe us. In other words, the emotional impact of our conversation remains even if we take away all verbal communication.

How we use our bodies gives other people a massive amount of information about who we are, what we're thinking, and how we're feeling. This includes our posture and the way we hold our bodies.

In this section, we will explore the link between deep breathing and good posture, and how harnessing these things means more effective non-verbal communication that can help influence others.

## Posture and alignment

We are all aware that we should stand up straight.

However, what does it really look and feel like to be standing as we should? Why does it matter?

It matters because when we are standing well it helps us breathe well. This helps us manage nerves and speak with a strong engaging voice, as we discovered in the previous section.



## Posture and alignment demonstration



Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, arms by your side... now imagine there is a piece of string pulling you tall from the top of your head. You are a broken puppet and this is the only string left attached!

What this does is keep our shoulders relaxed and stops us puffing out our chest or yanking back our shoulders.

You'll notice that your chest is relaxed, your shoulders are relaxed but your knees are soft. Your neck will feel long and your back will be straight.

Think about how you can use this approach to standing or sitting when you're under pressure. Consider what effect it might have if you pull yourself up tall and straight when you feel under pressure, when you want to make an impact, when you want to walk into the room and come across with gravitas, with influence and with presence.

From this place, we can walk, or sit, or start to speak knowing we have helped ourselves feel good and look confident.

## Body language habits and preferences

Now we're breathing deeply and are aware of our posture and alignment, what are the body language habits and preferences that can help us communicate more effectively?

*"When our body language is confident and open, other people respond in kind, unconsciously reinforcing not only their perception of us but also our perception of ourselves."*

*Amy Cuddy, Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*

## Body language demonstration



Stand in front of a mirror, or work with a friend to get feedback on how changes in your posture affect your presence and impact when you speak.

Stand with strong, open and grounded body language with a smile on your face and your hands in front of you in a relaxed way.

Then break it down by changing one thing at a time and see how the impact of your story changes; think about the shift in how you feel.



For example, crossing your legs as you stand might feel more comfortable, but it also destabilises the balance in your posture and makes it more difficult to breathe deeply.



Focus on what your arms and shoulders are doing as you speak, particularly if you feel nervous. If you notice your hands clasping and your shoulders tensing up, practise being mindful of this and deliberately lowering and relaxing your stance. This will make a big difference to how you feel and how your voice projects.

## Takeaway

Notice your own body language habits. Try and focus on a balance of positive and negative rather than be overly critical of yourself. Observe others as they communicate with you. What works? What could you try out?

# Reading other people's body language

## 1. Don't assume

A lot of people will tell you that different types of body language mean different things. For example, that having your arms crossed means that you're disengaged. However, bear in mind that it could mean absolutely anything. Rather than being disengaged, someone with their arms folded might be cold, or it might just be a position in which they feel relaxed. So, be curious - if you notice somebody do something like cross their arms, think about who they are, what situation they are in, and perhaps ask them how they are feeling rather than assuming too much from their body language.

## 2. Look for a change

If you're in a conversation with somebody and a particular topic is raised and you notice a shift in a person's body language, posture, or even facial expressions, ask yourself, 'What's just happened?' and get curious about what that shift might mean. Usually a shift in body language is reflecting a shift physically or a shift emotionally. It might mean that person is suddenly in physical discomfort... or it might mean that they don't particularly want to talk about the topic that has been raised. So again, be curious, and if it's appropriate you can ask a question about what's going on

## 3. Think about how you respond to other people's body language

Most of us have heard the expression 'to mirror and match'. We know that when we want to build rapport with somebody it can be useful to reflect the kind of body language that they're displaying. This particular tool can be really useful if you have somebody in the room who is behaving with real 'power' and you want them to hear what you have to say. If they are taking up a lot of space and have high volume in their voice and gestures, think about how you might dial up your own body language: take up space and you might find that they listen to what you have to say more effectively. Be curious! Try it and see what happens...

The other thing you might want to think about is not always matching other people's body language. For example, if you are in a negotiation or a difficult conversation and you find that the other person is becoming angry and that their body language has shifted, this might be an opportunity for you to display different body language: to be purposefully calm, to take your shoulders down and maybe even soften your facial expressions. If you want to avoid conflict, avoid mirror and match.

## EXERCISE

A) Take some time to think of three different situations in which you are presenting yourself to others.

Take each situation and think about how you would like to come across. Do you want to be convincing, have gravitas, seem confident and relaxed, or perhaps be approachable? Now think about the kind of posture and body language you might want to use to help you come across in this way. Use the space below (or your own journal or notebook) to record your notes. Be curious and always ready to try new things to see what the result might be.

- What was the situation?
- What was your goal?
- How close did you come to achieving this outcome?
- What did you do that worked well?
- What might you try next time?

B) Observe the people around you. Notice their posture, body shape, gestures and facial expressions. What are they doing that works well? Which of their non-verbal strategies could you try out for yourself? Use the space below (or your own journal) to do some reflective writing.

### Takeaway

Be mindful of your posture. How you sit at your computer, how you stand on the train or when you're in a queue, and how you hold yourself in meetings. Good posture affects how others perceive you and crucially it affects how you feel.

Stand tall and you'll feel better!

### Useful resources

Take a look at this great TED Talk about the physiology of body language from Power Pose expert Amy Cuddy:

[www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are)

# Warming up for the perfect performance

Many clients tell me they start to relax and perform better 10 or 15 minutes into the meeting, event or presentation. Why? Because by that time their bodies, brains and voices have warmed up.

Warming up is something that all actors and athletes do before any practice, performance or match.

To perform at your best, you need to be 'in the zone' and absolutely ready to hit the ground running. The following exercise is a simple actor's warm-up that you can use every day to feel calmer and strengthen your voice. It's very effective if used before an event where you want to operate at your best.

## EXERCISE

Your exercise for this section is to practise this warm up every day for a week AND before any moment when you want to influence effectively. You can combine it with your breathing exercises! Don't take this too seriously, it should be light-hearted and fun. Have a go and see what difference it makes.

What will help you succeed with this exercise? Buddy up with a colleague, so that you can both do the exercise each day and be accountable to each other if you don't!

Use your journal or make notes in the section below about what difference this practice makes to the strength in your voice and how confident you feel when speaking.

## Takeaway

Your voice is controlled by muscles: your intercostal muscles, your diaphragm and also your vocal chords. If you get these muscles fit with a daily warm-up routine, you will have a stronger and more agile voice. You will avoid vocal wobbles and the pitfalls of a nervous cough too.

## EXERCISE

Using the space below or your own journal, think of a situation or conversation that you have coming up that is a challenge for you and take some time to set yourself a clear goal.

A) What do you want to achieve? Write this out in detail.

B) How will you measure your success? Think of some clear markers for yourself. What will you have, see, hear, or feel if you have succeeded? Write down these clear measures of success.

C) Now think back through all the themes of this workbook:

- Breathing
- Posture and body language
- Warming up
- Curiosity and playfulness

Which of these can you utilise to help you achieve your goal? How will you use them?

D) After the event take some time to go back to your goal and your measures. Did you achieve what you intended to? What evidence do you have?

E) If you didn't achieve your goal, what would you do differently next time to get you closer?

### Takeaway

Your goal might centre around your own behaviour or 'the story you want to tell about who you are'. It may also centre around the other person or people in the interaction.

For example: My intention is that the audience for my presentation will come away knowing three key things about my project, and see the value it offers. Think about how this clarity will help you structure your presentation.



# Your personal action plan

## Review

Take some time to review everything we have covered in this workbook.

## Journal

Use your own journal or notebook and do some reflective writing.

- Which elements of this workbook have resonated for you?
- What has been most useful?
- Take some time to reflect on how these various ideas interlink for you.
- Which ideas might you use and when might you use them?
- How will you continue the process of being curious and trying new things?

Committing to writing in your journal for 30 days will really embed the learning, and your new physical and psychological habits.

## Actions

What actions have you committed to take?

- Make a list of what you have decided to do to improve your communication skills for better influencing. Be clear and specific about what you will do and when you will do it. For example, if you have committed to do the breathing exercises every day, decide exactly how that will work. 'I commit to take ten minutes every evening to do my deep breathing practice. I will set an alarm in my phone at 8pm every evening to remind me.'

# Step up your influencing skills through body language and clear communication

## Further resources

Bandler, R., & Roberti, A., *The Ultimate Introduction to Nlp: How To Build A Successful Life* (2013)

Cuddy, A., *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges* (2016) Grenville-Cleave, B.,  
*Positive Psychology (Introducing a Practical Guide)* (2012)

Peters, S., *The Chimp Paradox: The Mind Management Programme to Help You Achieve Success, Confidence and Happiness* (2012)

Rodenburg, P., *Presence: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation* (2009)

## everywomanNetwork resources

Webinar: Learn how to use your body language for greater influence and impact

Quiz: Are you body language fluent?

Article: Confidence-boosting body language hacks for everyday workplace scenarios

Any topics you'd like to see on the everywomanNetwork? We'd love to hear from you:  
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