



by Douglas E. Wicklander, CFI, CFE and David E. Zulawski, CFI, CFE

Wicklander and Zulawski are partners in the investigative and training firm of Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates, Inc. (www.w-z.com). They are also the authors of *Practical Aspects of Interview and Interrogation 2nd Edition*, CRC Press, 2001. They can be reached at 800-222-7789 or dwicklander@w-z.com and dzulawski@w-z.com.

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Non-Verbal Cues

Many researchers have addressed the concept of non-verbal communication and its importance to understanding spoken words. Some have even suggested estimates that over 90 percent of communication between people is nonverbal, with words accounting for less than 10 percent of meaning. With all our focus on the spoken words, most people would find these numbers and the concept surprising.

However, regardless of the true percentages, one has to merely observe people in social settings out of earshot of their conversation to realize the amount of information that can be accurately discerned. The careful observer may note the lingering glance of two lovers, an individual's discomfort at meeting someone new, or the relaxed manner of two old friends. At a business gathering can you tell who is subordinate and who's the superior based on their nonverbal body language? Many times it takes only a moment of watching to divine this and other information.

Learning from Body Language

Are we the only ones paying attention to these clues? Isn't it interesting that we focus on the subject's behavior during the interview, but fail to monitor our own body language during the encounter. The subject may not be as consciously aware of his observations as the interviewer, but he is nonetheless processing these clues on a subconscious level.

Each of us has internally linked our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors as we learned and matured. Those behavioral clues we observe in a subject are intimately linked to what the person is thinking and feeling at any given moment.

The body and the mind work together in harmony to express what we are feeling at any given time. The careful observer can mimic another's physical behavior and feel what the individual is feeling within himself.

Try copying the body position of someone who is exhausted—head down, slumped shoulders, slow labored movements, shallow breathing, and his slow drawn out speech. "I am so tired. I can hardly move." You can feel the energy literally drain from your body as you begin to mimic the exhausted body language.

Then raise your head, pull your shoulders back, increase your breathing rate, and feel the energy return. Interestingly, mirroring body language can give an indication of someone's

thoughts and emotions which may provide a valuable insight into the psyche.

Conscious versus Unconscious Mind

In an earlier column we discussed the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind and the part these play in creating a persuasive argument during the interview. The conscious portion of the mind is actually small in comparison to the unconscious that protects us from harm. The conscious part of the mind balances our check book while the unconscious portion helps defend us from harm.

When we focus on a topic of interest, we are selectively and momentarily paying attention. However, when our mind wanders, the subconscious mind is still monitoring the

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environment and looking for clues in a passive way. From this subconscious monitoring we get "a feeling that something is wrong" or a sense of "I just don't trust him," but not a specific behavioral clue that supports the feeling.

Most investigators have had this feeling, one they can not quite put their finger on, but a feeling they have learned to trust. In the same way, a subject who is trying to determine whether to trust his interviewer will likely use the subconscious mind to help determine if the interviewer is to be trusted. It is unlikely that the subject's conscious mind will be focused enough to observe specific behavioral clues from the interviewer as the realization of being caught triggers both physiological and psychological changes in the body that result in a flight or fight reaction.

The human brain has a great capacity to generalize from past experiences, which has both positive and negative outcomes. Generalization allows us to anticipate outcomes and determine

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whether it is appropriate for the current situation. The instinct to flee when confronted, however, is counteracted by the conscious mind's control over the situation, but even it is divided.

Left and Right Brain Behaviors

Most have heard of the left and right sides of the brain. We casually offer this as an excuse why someone reacts a certain way. The reactions we can observe in a subject are the result of the left or right hemispheres of his brain as it triggers often conflicting memories, thoughts, or emotions.

What results are subtle behavioral cues that can be observed by the interviewer as the brain hemispheres struggle for control of the situation. One can easily imagine the inner conflict as the emotional side of the brain votes to flee while the rational side elects to stay. This conflict results in unconscious clues to the inner dialog of the subject as the two hemispheres with different skills collide.

Internal conflict resulting from the basic desire to flee or fight increases tension and anxiety within the individual. In an interview the basic problem for the guilty is two unpleasant choices—try to run and it brings attention and suspicion, or stay and face a decidedly unpleasant conversation. It is only when this conflict is resolved that the person is able to reduce the anxiety and make the choice to confess.

The movement of each side of the body and face are controlled by opposite sides of the brain. This may give an

interviewer an indication whether the subject is making a rational or emotional decision to confess.

The following seems to be true for most western cultures.

- The left hemisphere of the brain is tasked with verbal and logical thinking. It handles the management of numbers, is more analytic, and makes decisions based on certainty or probabilities.
- On the other hand, the right brain functions in an intuitive manner, understanding patterns and relationships, plus the overall perception of situations. Essentially the right side of the brain functions in a more emotional and illogical fashion. It is this side of the brain that makes leaps of logic based on intuition, rather than the linear thinking of the left hemisphere.

So how does understanding the relationship of brain hemispheres help us during an interview? This is a question that we will be addressing in upcoming columns.

First, being able to identify whether a subject is making an emotional or rational decision can help the interviewer frame rationalizations.

Second, the interviewer can observe behaviors that may help in understanding the subject's resistance.

Third, the behavior and posture of the interviewer can be modified to reach the subconscious mind in a more effective way.

These and other areas will be discussed in our next column.

Missing and Exploited Children

Cindy, a lovely energetic 13-year-old girl, disappeared while going to visit her boyfriend nearly twenty years ago. The case was kept alive by a detective who just could not let it die, even after all these years.

When we were asked to join the investigation, it was evident that our recording equipment was not sufficient to document a possible lengthy interview with the suspect. Since the suspect's statement would be critical to a prosecution, we asked for help in the project. We want to extend our appreciation to two companies and their employees for the generous support they provided.

Pelco and Peter Schmidt graciously arranged the loan of a 5100 DVR to record the interview. Steve May of Loss Prevention Innovations arranged for Mike Korcuba, national account manager for Securex, a division of LPI, to provide the camera, microphone, and installation of the equipment in the prison where the suspect is incarcerated. Their generosity in time and equipment may help bring this case to a resolution.

Limited Brands has supported the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.ncmec.org) by hosting fundraising events at the National Retail Federation and Retail Industry Leaders Association LP conferences, and we encourage their continued work with this charity. We applaud all companies that use Code Adam and protect our children in ways large and small.

AUTHORS' NOTE: Certified forensic interviewers can answer questions about previous LossPrevention magazine articles at www.certifiedinterviewer.com to obtain continuing education credits toward CFI recertification. ■

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