

# Diversity Activities

## Nonverbal Translations

### Objectives

To build awareness of cultural differences in nonverbal communication and develop strategies for bridging the cross-cultural gap.

### Time

15 - 45 minutes

### Materials

- Tip sheet: “Cross-Cultural Communication: Translating Nonverbal Cues,” one copy for each participant
- Case studies, one for every four participants

### Instructions

1. **Before you meet:** Distribute the tip sheets and ask participants to read them ahead of time.
2. Divide participants into groups of four.
3. Assign a case study to each group.
4. Allow about ten minutes for small group discussion.
5. For each of the four case studies, allow one group to briefly share what they learned.
6. Ask discussion questions.

### For Discussion

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt your nonverbal language was misunderstood?
2. Have you ever experienced a cross-cultural situation where a better understanding of nonverbal signals could have improved communication?

### Variation

For a longer activity, have each group discuss more than one case study.

# Nonverbal Translations

## Case Studies

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**1** You ask an Asian coworker to take on a certain task. She appears reluctant to look you in the eye, and instead stares over your left shoulder while you speak. She says yes, she will do the job, but two weeks later, nothing has happened.

1. What is your gut reaction to this situation? How do you feel about what has happened? What assumptions might you make about your coworker?
2. How might the information in the tip sheet change your interpretation of the situation?
3. What are some steps you could take to clarify the situation?
4. What are some questions you could ask your coworker to allow her to express her true feelings without having to tell you “no”?

**2** A group of teenage Somali boys often congregates around the entrance to your apartment building in the afternoons and evenings. They seem loud, and they make many of the residents of your building nervous.

1. Why are the residents nervous? What messages are they receiving from the boys' behavior?
2. What messages do the boys mean to send?
3. Imagine for a moment about what village life in Somalia might be like. Why might this behavior be considered natural or normal there?
4. What are some steps that could be taken to improve the situation?

### 3

You are a woman, and an Italian man has recently come to work in your office. He stands quite close to you when the two of you talk, gazes directly into your eyes, frequently touches you on the arm, and asks a lot of personal questions about your family.

1. What is your gut reaction to this situation? How do you interpret his behavior?
2. What other interpretations are possible?
3. What are some ways you might be able to learn what interpretation is correct?
4. If he has no romantic intentions, and you understand this, how should you deal with this situation? What are the benefits of saying nothing and simply accepting his Italian ways? What are the benefits of telling him plainly how his behavior makes you feel?

### 4

You ask a Sudanese employee if he can work late the next day. He says bluntly, “No, I cannot.” You suggest the day after, and he repeats, “I cannot,” with no explanation or apologies. He is about a foot taller than you, and he is looking directly into your eyes and speaking quite loudly.

1. What is your gut reaction to this situation? How do you perceive this employee’s attitude?
2. How might your perception of this incident influence the way you treat this employee in the future?
3. What could you do to determine whether your understanding of the situation is correct?
4. How might your employee’s English skills play a part in this situation? How would you have phrased a response if you were unable to work late? List some of the words and phrases we sprinkle through our conversations that do not add directly to the meaning of what we are saying (e.g. *I think, quite, I was wondering...*). What is the purpose of these words? How might immigrants’ English skills affect how their attitude and character is perceived?