

EQ: LHO Body Language in Conversations and Interviews

One thing you can control in LHO conversations and interviews is the message you project. You want to show confidence and professionalism while maintaining a human touch – a balance that will make things easier for you. It has been established many times that, when it comes to communication, the words we use sometimes matter less than our appearance and our tone. There are many cultural and individual differences in the way people send and receive body language, and these tips are based on general norms. The suggestions are meant as a guide only – with plenty of exceptions.

Although these ideas may seem “touchy-feely” to some, they actually work. Most studies say body language and tone make up more than 90% of the communication we exchange.

The Power of “SOFTEN”

- The Acronym:** SOFTEN stands for an appropriate use of *smiling*, *open* body language, *forward* listening, *touch* on handshakes, *eye-contact*, and *nodding*.
- Smiles:** Unless the situations are too “serious” and a smile is inappropriate, a real smile at the beginning helps set the tone for the rest of the conversation or interview.
- Open:** Open shoulders, arms, and hands show confidence. Projecting strength and professionalism makes it more likely people will cooperate with you.
- Forward:** If sitting, leaning slightly forward shows your attention. If standing, try to be close enough to the person to signal you are listening – but don’t go too close as it may seem intimidating. The accepted space between speakers varies by culture and individuals.
- Touch:** The professionally firm handshake is generally a great way to begin, but it is always wise to consider gender and cultural issues.
- Eye Contact:** The basic guideline is to give 3-5 seconds of eye contact; more seems intimidating, less seems distant or nervous. In interviews, try to make some eye contact while talking instead of just writing things down.
- Nodding:** Nodding is an affirmative gesture. Not enough seems passive and too much seems anxious. It may be useful to avoid nodding when people are being uncooperative, as you don’t want to appear to agree with them.