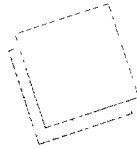


*An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article*



# The role of nonverbal communication in service encounters

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**Abstract** *Although the verbal components of service encounters have been investigated, the nonverbal aspects of employee-customer interactions have remained virtually unexplored in the marketing literature. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of service employees' nonverbal communication during service interactions. Specifically, a conceptual model is presented that links nonverbal communication (kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, and physical appearance), customer affect, and consumers' evaluations of service providers (with respect to credibility, friendliness, competence, empathy, courtesy, and trustworthiness). Further, the importance of nonverbal elements is discussed and managerial implications are given.*

## Interaction

The interaction between service employees and customers, commonly referred to as the service encounter, is a critical part of the service delivery process because its elements greatly impact customers' evaluations of service consumption experiences (Soloman *et al.*, 1985). Therefore, it is no surprise that many service managers and researchers have been interested in the dynamics of service encounters, both contemplating and examining how they can enhance our understanding of how customers evaluate service experiences.

Because customers' evaluations of service encounters are based on the nature of their interactions with service employees, service managers need to be cognizant of the importance of continuously striving to improve the quality of the interactions that take place in their business firms. Indeed, leading service organizations (e.g. Marriott Hotel Corp.) spend considerable effort in identifying employee behaviors that generate favorable responses from customers.

## Positive influence

It is commonly known that employees' display of affective characteristics, such as friendliness, responsiveness, and enthusiasm, positively influences customers' overall evaluation of service consumption experiences and perceptions of service quality. Further, we are aware that employees' verbal behavior during an encounter (such as words of greeting and courtesy) affect customer perceptions of employee friendliness and consequently enhance the perceived quality of the service interaction (Elizur, 1987). However, what is relatively unclear is the nature of the effect of service employees' actions – particularly their nonverbal behavior – on customers' perceptions of service employees' characteristics (such as their friendliness, competence, and credibility). This lack of clarity is unfortunate because research in the

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communication field reveals that the nonverbal components are at least as important as the verbal components of interpersonal communication in shaping the outcome of employee-customer interactions (e.g. Barnum and Wolniansky, 1989; Burgoon *et al.*, 1990). In fact, nearly half of the variations in response to interpersonal communication can be attributed to nonverbal factors (Mehrabian, 1981). It is even suggested that nonverbal communication, the form of communicating thoughts and emotions without using words, accounts for nearly 70 percent of all communication (Barnum and Wolniansky, 1989).

#### **Scarcity of research**

Service employees' nonverbal behavior remains virtually unexplored despite its importance with respect to the outcome of service encounters. This scarcity of research attention is probably due to researchers' earlier focus on macro issues, such as the antecedents of services quality (e.g. Bolton and Drew, 1991), the relationship between service quality and business profitability (e.g. Rust *et al.*, 1995), and service recovery efforts (e.g. Webster and Sundaram, 1998).

Although interpersonal interaction is completely lacking in some service encounters (e.g. banking via ATM machines), the majority of service delivery situations involve considerable interpersonal contact between service provider and customer. For example, a substantial amount of interaction takes place between employees and customers for travel, dining, hotel, health-care, financial, physical fitness, and beauty-related services. The services characterized by considerable interpersonal contact are likely to benefit greatly from an investigation of the role of nonverbal communication on customers' evaluations of service experiences.

#### **A managerial viewpoint**

From a managerial viewpoint, it is important to understand not only how service employees' nonverbal behavior – their degree of friendliness, credibility, trustworthiness, and competence – relate to customers' perceptions of service quality, but also how customers evaluate their interaction with service employees to determine the extent to which service employees are friendly, credible, trustworthy, and competent. An understanding of the impact of nonverbal communication on customers' evaluations will enable service managers to train their employees to utilize nonverbal cues more effectively so that customers' perceptions will be affected as positively as possible. This article addresses this issue by examining the role of nonverbal communication on customers' evaluations of service providers.

#### **Background and conceptual model**

Service encounters typically comprise the delivery of the requested service and some sort of interpersonal communication between the service employee and the customer. It is known that interpersonal communication is an integral part of many service delivery situations and that it greatly impacts consumers' perceptions. The significance of the effect of interpersonal communication on customers' evaluations is even greater in "pure services" – those in which service delivery involves a high degree of person-to-person interaction and no exchange of tangible objects.

#### **An investigation**

In an investigation of service employees' behaviors that led to customer dissatisfaction, unpleasant or displeasing nonverbal behavior surfaced as one of the major reasons for customer dissatisfaction (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). The critical role of nonverbal communication is further evident from research findings indicating that nonverbal cues play a significant role in shaping receivers' perceptions of communicators' credibility (Burgoon *et al.*, 1990), persuasive power (Mehrabian and Williams, 1969), courtesy (Ford, 1995), and interpersonal warmth (Bayes, 1972).

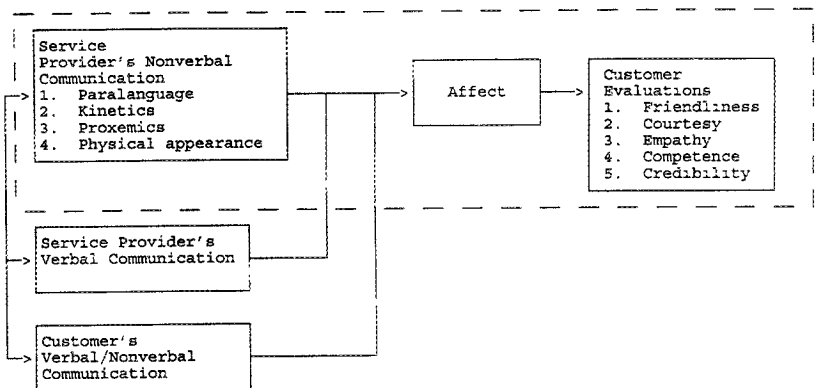
**The interpersonal communication process**

An examination of past research focusing on nonverbal communication in the sociology, psychology and communication fields helps us to understand better how service customers are likely to process employees' nonverbal communication. Advocated to explain the interpersonal communication process within the psychology literature, the modified Brunswickian lens model suggests that a sender's emotional status and other traits are externalized or expressed in distal indicator cues (i.e. characteristics of the sender's nonverbal behavior) (Scherer, 1982; Burgoon *et al.*, 1990). The receiver, following his or her observation and internalization of the cues, makes an attribution about the nature of the sender's traits or states, such as competence, composure, or persuasiveness. This model indicates that during the communication process, individuals process nonverbal cues in conjunction with the accompanying verbal message. Indeed, listeners (or customers) are likely to attend to and elaborate on the nonverbal cues before actually comprehending the verbal communication.

Past research in sociology and communication indicates that individuals learn from early childhood how to use nonverbal behavioral signals as a communication vehicle (Palmer and Simmons, 1995). In fact, the manner in which individuals learn to communicate nonverbally is similar to how they learn a vocal language. Once having learned to communicate nonverbally, individuals consciously and unconsciously integrate nonverbal cues into conversations, using them to convey specific social meanings such as intimacy, immediacy, involvement, and dominance (Burgoon, 1991).

**A conceptual model**

To guide our discussion, we present a conceptual model that highlights the role of nonverbal communication in service interactions. Although the complete model is depicted in Figure 1, this article focuses on the section enclosed by dotted lines – the relationships among providers' nonverbal cues (kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, and physical appearance), affect, and customer evaluations. The model suggests that both verbal and nonverbal elements of communication between the service provider and the customer influence customers' affect or subjective feelings, which in turn influence their evaluation of the service encounter. Note that the multitude of nonverbal communication cues have been grouped into four major categories: paralanguage, kinetics, proxemics, and physical appearance. The model further suggests that customers' nonverbal and verbal responses will influence service providers' nonverbal cues and will also moderate their interpretation of the providers' nonverbal communication. Regardless of whether or not service providers' nonverbal cues are in response to



Note \*The dotted lines indicate the component of the model discussed in the paper

Figure 1.

customers' cues, service providers' nonverbal behavior is likely to have a significant impact on customers' affective state or feelings.

Affect is included as an intermediate step between nonverbal cues and service evaluations because customers' affective reaction to the provider is an outcome of the cognitive process in which they identify, associate, and evaluate verbal and nonverbal cues disseminated by the service providers. Further, the resulting affect is likely to guide their evaluations. Although affective reactions are influenced by both verbal and nonverbal cues, inferences about relationships and feelings (affect) are more heavily influenced by nonverbal cues (Zajonc, 1980). Thus, whether customers' affective state will be influenced in a positive or a negative direction depends on the nature of the cues and on whether they received the anticipated nonverbal cues.

### **Customers' evaluations vary**

Customers' evaluations of the service experience – and particularly, their evaluations of the service provider – are likely to vary depending on the valence and directionality of affect. For example, pleasing nonverbal cues producing positive affect may encourage customers to associate positive characteristics with service providers, while unpleasant nonverbal cues producing negative affect are likely to cause customers to view service providers in a negative manner. In addition, customers are likely to observe whether service providers reciprocate favorably to their positive nonverbal cues.

Following is a discussion of how the four types of nonverbal cues are likely to influence customers' perceptions of service providers.

### **Nonverbal channels of communication**

#### *Kinesics*

Kinesics, also known as body movements, serve as important vehicles for nonverbal communication. In particular, body orientation (e.g. relaxed, open posture), eye contact, nodding, hand shaking, and smiling are all powerful nonverbal signals in interpersonal interactions. Although each body movement probably does not have its own unique meaning, several body movements tend to convey similar meaning. For instance, research suggests that the cues of casual smiling, light laughter, forward body lean, open body posture, and frequent eye contact are perceived as conveying intimacy and non-dominance – the characteristics commonly associated with friendliness and courtesy. On the other hand, kinesics such as stoic facial expressions, either staring or avoiding eye contact, backward lean of body, and closed body posture are perceived as conveying dominance, unfriendliness, and emotional distance (e.g. Burgoon *et al.*, 1990; Mehrabian and Williams, 1969).

### **Eye contact is important**

Research has shown that eye contact, as a certain aspect of kinesics, is particularly important with respect to its effect on perceptions and interpersonal relations. While perceptions of a communicator's credibility become more favorable with more frequent and appropriately longer eye contact, perceptions of distrust increase with the absence of eye contact (Hemsley and Doob, 1978). Further, eye contact has been linked to increased likeability, believability (Beebe, 1980), and satisfaction (Ketrow and Perkins, 1986). A study focusing on the role of nonverbal cues in banking service transactions found that a greater usage of eye contact by bank tellers resulted in higher customer satisfaction with the service provider and with the service firm (Ketrow and Perkins, 1986).

The display of interpersonal warmth (i.e. showing interest in and acceptance and approval of other people) is logically associated with service employees. It is

## Satisfying relationships

particularly important for service employees to show warmth toward customers because such behavior serves as the basis for building satisfying relationships. Although interpersonal warmth can be communicated via both verbal and nonverbal cues, studies in clinical psychology note that warmth is more effectively communicated through nonverbal channels. In an investigation of a variety of vocal and kinesic nonverbal cues, smiling emerged as the most effective indicator of interpersonal warmth (Bayes, 1972). The same study found that people who smiled frequently were perceived as exhibiting more warmth than those who did not smile often. Likewise, the absence of positive facial expressions and body movements, including smiling, is considered an indication of negative affect and a lack of warmth and friendliness.

Kinesic cues such as eye contact, nodding, hand shaking, and smiling can be employed at various stages of service delivery to build satisfying relationships. For example, service providers should make it a point to initiate service encounters with a smile. And because most people tend to vividly remember what they have been exposed to at the end of an exchange, service providers should also conclude the encounter with a pleasant, friendly smile.

In service situations where customers typically have encounters with different employees, they are likely to have a lasting impression that the firm and its employees are customer-oriented if those employees greet the customers with a smile. If the service employee's smile is accompanied by eye contact, the impact is even greater. While smiling will create the perceptions of warmth and friendliness, employees' eye contact will give the impression that they are sincere about their interest in their customers. As an example, airlines typically have their crew greet customers while boarding and unboarding the aircraft. It is imperative for employees to smile at and have eye contact with each customer. Otherwise, the effect may be more negative than had the customer not been greeted at all. Customers receiving a smile usually reciprocate accordingly and feel that the service provider cares about them and will treat them with respect. For example, physicians and nurses providing health care services to children have long recognized the power of smiling. Children tend to bond with those physicians and nurses who smile and touch them. Such nonverbal behavior tends to comfort children and leaves the parents with the feeling that the service providers are caring, concerned, and friendly.

## Professional service situations

In professional services situations (e.g. interactions between attorneys and clients), it is both appropriate and wise for customers to be welcomed with a firm hand shake and eye contact. If the service situation involves considerable interpersonal conversation or discussion (e.g. physician, attorney, and therapist visits), service providers can effectively employ nodding and frequent eye contact to indicate understanding and empathy. In such situations, nodding is likely to enhance customers' perceptions of trust and courtesy. In all service situations, the use of frequent eye contact accompanied by other complementary nonverbal cues will help enhance perceptions of trust, believability, and sincerity. On the other hand, service employees should never use nonverbal cues that communicate dominance, unconcern, and superiority, such as scant or piercing eye contact, finger pointing, and closed body posture.

The preceding discussion leads us to the proposition that:

*P1:* Smiling, light laughter, and frequent eye contact by service providers will enhance customers' perceptions of friendliness and courtesy.

*P2:* Head nodding by service providers will enhance customers' perceptions of empathy, courtesy, and trust.

## Importance of paralinguage

P3: Frequent eye contact by service providers will enhance customers' perceptions of credibility.

P4: Hand shaking by service providers will enhance customers' perceptions of friendliness and courtesy.

### *Paralanguage*

Interpersonal communication studies indicate that the noncontent or nonverbal aspects of a message are at least as important as the actual content. While verbal statements can convey states of being, listeners use paralinguistic cues, such as vocal pitch, vocal loudness or amplitude, pitch variation, pauses, and fluency, to perceive the exact state of being. For example, a communicator might use a verbal statement to convey confidence (e.g. "I am positively sure that..."), but listeners will consciously and unconsciously interpret the paralanguage to assess the communicator's degree of confidence. Research reveals that when a listener or receiver attempts to judge where the speaker or source is on a contempt-affection continuum, they rely more on the tone of the voice than on the content of the message. This fact is evident from Argyle *et al.*'s (1970) study that found that, even when the content of the message was disturbed by means of random splicing of the tape, listeners were able to detect the emotions expressed in the message based only on the tone of the voice.

Using the conveyance of confidence as an example, the drive theory of social facilitation, which links nonverbal cues with states of being, helps us understand the importance of paralanguage. The drive theory of social facilitation suggests that individuals with higher levels of confidence tend to experience increased drive or arousal and will consequently speak faster (i.e. faster than normal speech rate of 120 to 160 words per minute) and louder than their less confident counterparts. Indeed, in Kimble and Seidel's (1991) test of the theory, it was revealed that subjects who responded in a louder voice were perceived as more confident than those who spoke with less volume.

Further, studies on vocal characteristics have revealed that fluent speech that is free of long pauses, hesitations, and repetitions is considered more credible than nonfluent speech (Erickson *et al.*, 1978). However, brief to moderate pauses tend to enhance perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness (Scherer, 1982). Similarly, pitch variation was shown also to enhance perceptions of competence and sociability (Scherer, 1982). On the other hand, disfluencies, long pauses, increasing and decreasing tempo, and higher pitch were associated with negative affect and anxiety (Siegman, 1978). On the basis of pitch, speech rate, vocal intensity, and inflection, communication theorists have classified speech delivery patterns into a conversational style (lower pitch, slower rate, lower to moderate volume, and less inflection) and a public speaking or dynamic style (higher pitch, faster, high vocal intensity, higher inflection) (Pearce and Conklin, 1971; Pearce and Brommel, 1972). An investigation of how listeners responded to these two styles revealed that speakers who used a conversational style were rated as trustworthy, kind, warm, friendly, and pleasant, while those who used a public speaking style were associated with dynamism, dominance, and competence (Pearce and Conklin, 1971).

In service situations where it is appropriate (and perhaps even expected) for service providers to be particularly kind, warm, and friendly (e.g. in the health and beauty care, hotel, restaurant, transportation, and counseling services), service providers need to use more paralinguistic cues associated with a conversational style. Such cues are likely to facilitate employees to portray an image that they are people-oriented rather than task-oriented. On

the other hand, in service situation where consumers are likely to expect the provider to be more business- or task-oriented, (e.g. in the financial, legal, and advertising fields), service providers might place more weight on using a public speaking style. For example, an attorney who wants to present a competent and yet friendly image might use a public speaking style to portray competence and dynamism – but also the kinesic nonverbal cues of nodding, frequent eye contact, and occasional smiling to convey warmth and friendliness. Thus,

*P5:* Service providers' usage of a slower speech rate, lower pitch, moderate pauses, and less inflection will enhance customers' perceptions of friendliness and credibility.

*P6:* Service providers' usage of a faster speech rate, higher pitch, high vocal intensity, and higher inflection will enhance customers' perceptions of competence, but will reduce their perceptions of friendliness.

#### *Proxemics*

Proxemics refers to the distance and relative postures of the interactants. An element of proxemics that is highly relevant in service interactions is touch. The theory of relational communication suggests that the use of the nonverbal cue of touch in an interpersonal exchange can increase attentional arousal and interpersonal involvement and significantly impact recipients' attitudes toward the source of the touch.

Specifically, studies on the role of touch in interpersonal communication reveal that touch enhances one's interpersonal involvement, positive affect, social attachment, intimacy, and overall liking (Price *et al.*, 1995). Hornik and Ellis (1988) found that individuals touched by the interviewer showed greater willingness to participate in mall-intercept interviews. Based on these and other findings, Hornik (1992) suggested that touching increases compliance. The persuasive power of touch is further evident in the findings of Patterson *et al.* (1986) stating that people tend to associate positive characteristics with the individual who touched them. Further, these individuals are more likely to act positively toward those who touched them. For instance, customers who had been touched by beauty service providers indicated that it was both the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the provider that attributed to their favorable attitudes. Similarly, Hornik (1992) found that the restaurant patrons who were touched by servers tended to express positive regard for the servers and even complied with requests from the servers.

Although touch can be used to communicate friendliness, warmth, and appreciation in all types of service encounters, the manner in which touch affects customer evaluations can best be illustrated with health-care services. A typical health-care service involves multiple encounters, including contact with a receptionist, nurse, physician, and possibly a pharmacist. The physician-patient encounter, where touch is highly relevant, involves well defined activities, including gathering information, giving a medical examination, and providing recommendations for treatment. The medical examination stage involves task touch, meaning that the physician touches the patient as a part of the medical examination. Because task touch is a required part of the interaction, it will not necessarily be associated with warmth and friendliness. On the other hand, if the physician engages in voluntary touch (e.g. pat on the back, holding arm while verbally comforting the patient) while making treatment recommendations, the touch will be perceived as an indication of warmth, empathy, and friendliness.

## **Touch**

## **Health-care services**

In summary, research findings demonstrate that touch is perceived as a sign of closeness, warmth, affection, and empathy. Therefore, touch can be employed by service providers as an effective communication tool to display friendliness and empathy:

*P7:* Service providers' usage of touch will enhance customers' perceptions of friendliness and empathy.

#### *Physical appearance*

Physical appearance is another nonverbal element that is an important determinant of perception in interpersonal interactions. Several service organizations have policies regarding the physical appearance of their employees. For example, Disney requires its male employees to remove facial hair and its female employees to use cosmetics sparingly.

#### **Physical attractiveness**

An element of physical appearance that is particularly relevant to the service situation is physical attractiveness. Studies suggest that physically attractive communicators are more persuasive (Chaiken, 1979), successful in changing attitudes (Kahle and Homer, 1985), and are perceived as being more friendly than less attractive communicators. Further, more attractive people are perceived to be warmer, more poised, and more socially skilled than less attractive people (Chaiken, 1979).

Although the impact of a communicator's physical attractiveness diminishes as the receiver obtains more information about the communicator, physical attractiveness is an important factor at least during the initial encounter. The psychology literature offers an explanation of the relationship between physical attractiveness and an individual's perceptions and behavior.

Basically, individuals have inculcated the physical attractiveness stereotype, "What is beautiful is good." This ubiquitous stereotype is based on society's teaching that physical beauty is important and desirable. The stereotype about beauty has led people to associate attractiveness with favorable characteristics such as friendliness, likeability, and sociability (Reis *et al.*, 1980). It is logical to suspect that the attractiveness stereotype will operate in service encounters, just as it does in other types of social situations. Thus, it is logical to expect that a service provider's physical attractiveness will significantly affect customers' positive affect and consequently their perceptions of service providers' credibility, friendliness, competence, empathy, and courtesy.

#### **Appropriate dress codes**

The physical appearance of service providers can be enhanced by employing appropriate dress codes. The use of dress codes not only provides an identity with the organization, but also enhances the appearance of the employees. For example, several service businesses experimentally manipulated employee attire to determine the most effective style and manner of dress with respect to customers' perception of employee professionalism.

The type of attire considered appropriate will vary by service industry and gender of the service employee. For example, men working in professional services such as financial and legal services can wear a suit and tie to project poise, competence, and credibility. Female employees in professional services settings can wear navy, black, and gray suits to project competence and credibility. Similarly, service employees working in restaurant, hotel, museum, and recreational services can wear a tuxedo-type suit to create the perceptions of competence and credibility. Attire color affects physical appearance and the resulting perception. In general, darker suits create a perception of dominance and authority where lighter suits are associated with friendliness. Pinstripes and solid white shirts are associated with



credibility. While warm colors (e.g. red and yellow) are likely to create perceptions of dominance, cool colors (e.g. green and blue) may reinforce perceptions of friendliness and warmth. Color intensity has also been shown to affect perceptions. For instance, light to moderate intensity colors, compared with bright colors, will result in more positive evaluations.

Based on the preceding discussion, we offer the following propositions:

*P8:* The physical attractiveness of the service provider will be significantly related to customers' perceptions of friendliness, credibility, competence, empathy, and courtesy.

*P9:* Attire color and intensity worn by the service provider will affect customers' perceptions of friendliness, competence, and credibility.

### **A microscopic look**

#### **Summary and managerial implications**

Given the critical role of the service interpersonal encounter on customers' evaluations of service quality, it is crucial for service managers and researchers to take a microscopic look at the service encounter to understand better how each element of employee behavior is likely to influence customers' perceptions.

In all societies, people are conditioned to expect certain nonverbal signals (e.g. smiles and head nods) as indications of approval or attention during conversations. Failure on the part of service personnel to provide such signals is likely to affect the customer in a negative manner. Thus, in service encounters it becomes particularly important for service employees to understand and implement the nonverbal signals that will assure the customers that they are receiving complete attention and concern.

The significance of nonverbal communication may be even greater in those interactions which follow service failure. In such interactions, customers are more likely to attend closer to the service provider's behavior when they are either complaining or seeking retribution. Following service failure, customers are desirous of getting their problems or elements of their dissatisfaction resolved as quickly as possible and, in doing so, they have certain expectations with respect to service providers' behavior. During this period of anxiety, customers are particularly vigilant to notice nonverbal cues in an attempt to discern the service provider's intentions and attitudes regarding helping them. In such situations, the display of inappropriate nonverbal cues (e.g. frowning, lack of eye contact, closed body posture, etc.) is likely to create even more negative feelings on the part of the customer, probably resulting in negative word-of-mouth communication and intentions to discontinue their patronage with that particular service provider.

### **Credence-based services**

Nonverbal communication is also particularly important when customers attempt to evaluate credence-based services – those in which quality is especially difficult to assess (e.g. health-care and legal services). In such service situations, customers are likely to rely heavily on service providers' nonverbal behavior to develop their attitudes toward satisfaction and quality or value received. Confirming our view, a study in health-care services documented that physicians' nonverbal behaviors affected patients' satisfaction with health care, their compliance with prescribed treatments, and their rapport with their service provider (Larsen and Smith, 1981).

The proposed linkage between nonverbal cues and customer evaluations has several implications for service management. Therefore, to help service managers superintend nonverbal aspects of service employee-customer interactions, the following guidelines are offered:

### Continuous feedback

- (1) Ensure that service employees understand that nonverbal aspects of communication are at least as important as their verbal communication in shaping customers' evaluations.
- (2) Educate service employees to attend to their nonverbal cues when interacting with customers. Increase employee sensitivity to nonverbal cues by using training methods such as role playing and videotaping actual service interactions to provide feedback on nonverbal behaviors. For example, Elizur (1987) found that employees increased the frequency of their display of pleasing nonverbal cues (such as smiling) when provided with feedback on their nonverbal behaviors.
- (3) Modify service employees' nonverbal behaviors through continuous feedback and periodic reminders to produce favorable nonverbal cues. For example, mass-media vehicles such as newsletters can be used by organizations to remind employees of the importance of nonverbal elements of communication.
- (4) Educate service employees about the linkage between their vocal characteristics and customers' perceptions. Employees can be trained to change their speech characteristics so that they will speak with a more pleasant voice quality that displays warmth and trust. Training may involve educating service employees about the process of modifying their voice tone, diction, pitch, volume, and inflection.
- (5) Examine the manner in which service employees dress and determine if changes need to be made in color, design, and intensity to enhance physical appearance of employees. Attempt to match employees' manner of dress with customers' expectations. Note that customers' expectations will vary depending on their social status and industry type. In general, require employees to dress formally in professional services and when interacting with upper class customers. They may dress more casually when interacting with working or lower class clientele. Cool colors might be used when wanting to project an image of friendliness, poise, and warmth, and warm colors may be used to project an image of activity and excitement.

### Periodic surveys

- (6) Conduct periodic surveys to assess customers' perceptions of service employees' nonverbal behavior. These surveys can complement the firm's global evaluation of customer satisfaction and service quality. Many companies now use customer satisfaction surveys as a basis of rewarding individual service employees. For example, a component of the customer satisfaction survey conducted by May Flower Company focuses on the physical appearance of the truck driver and the sales agent who delivered the service. Customer satisfaction surveys that assess how well a particular service employee related with the customer can be used to determine merit-based rewards and to train employees by identifying areas for improvement. Further, evaluating individual employee performance will encourage employees to be cognizant of their behavior and to be responsive to customer needs.
- (7) In addition to surveys, consider using mystery shoppers to assess employee nonverbal behaviors. A standardized form might be used by the mystery shoppers to note their observations of an employee's specific nonverbal behaviors.
- (8) Encourage employees to adopt the recommended changes in nonverbal behaviors by providing positive reinforcements for adaptation.

## Summary

Control over one's nonverbal behavior may be quite difficult at times because it is partially determined by stressors such as the emotions and thoughts triggered by customers' behaviors. Therefore, managers should realize that training service employees to control their nonverbal communication is not an easy task. However, educating service employees of the significance of nonverbal communication is better than totally ignoring this essential element of interpersonal communication. Service employees are more likely to exercise control over their nonverbal behavior when they are aware of the tremendous impact that nonverbal behavior has on customer perceptions.

In summary, an understanding of how nonverbal cues affect customers' evaluations is important to service employees for several reasons. First, nonverbal cues are effective in reducing psychological distance and in enhancing the pleasant affect between the interactants. Second, nonverbal communication modifies and reinforces verbal communication. Further, customers' interpretation of service providers' nonverbal aspects of communication is likely to significantly affect their ensuing marketplace behavior.

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