



## The Secret of Persuasive Connection

Imagine you're in a room with four people all vying for your attention — and their speaking styles are vastly different.

- Speaker One approaches you with small movements, speaking quickly.
- Then Speaker Two approaches you with small movements and speaks very slowly.
- Speaker Three then approaches you with big movements, speaking quickly.
- Finally Speaker Four approaches you with big movements and speaks slowly.

Which of these speakers would you find most captivating?

According to Jenni Steck, vocal coach for CNN, CBS, and ESPN, speakers should strive for confident physical and verbal communication. That means relatively large movements and speaking slowly with assurance. Of the four speakers, you would probably perceive Speaker Four to be the most captivating. Why? Because small movement and gestures unconsciously come across as lacking confidence. Similarly, speaking too quickly also indicates nervousness. Whether that perceived lack of confidence is real doesn't actually matter. Our brains are built to interpret information and make judgments, especially in business situations.

Steck conducted this experiment with the audience at Lockton's 2023 Complex Risk Symposium. Her workshop, Perception and Connection: Communication Tools for Projecting Confidence and Building Connections, challenged participants to analyze various speaking and movement styles and then reflect on which techniques will help us connect more effectively with others.

A licensed speech language pathologist with two master's degrees, Steck has a successful career helping professionals in various fields become more engaging speakers. She believes connection is the essential ingredient for effectively communicating and building relationships. [How do we build connections? By appearing confident and trustworthy.](#)

Steck's exercise is based in part on the work of Harvard researcher, Dr. Amy Cuddy, who found that power posing before stressful events changes our physiology. Standing in an X pose (arms outstretched, legs apart) for 2 minutes was found to decrease levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Participants who power posed in Cuddy's study felt more powerful and were perceived as being more powerful. While further studies failed to yield the same data, most research agrees that at the very least, avoiding small, closed-off movements is vital to connecting with others.

Emerging technologies may help enhance communication, such as the Human Dynamics group at MIT Media Lab which is creating devices that measure gestures and vocal animation. Much like a Fitbit's ability to measure movement, these new devices may help us monitor our communication and its effectiveness.

Yet while technology may help enhance our communication, Steck points out that some technology is actually making communication more difficult. Take, for instance, the Zoom meeting where participants turn off their cameras. The lack of facial expression and nonverbal feedback can be devastating and exhausting. Steck suggests that in addition to asking for cameras to be on, standing during a Zoom meeting may enhance the physical energy of a call. At the very least, leaning forward into the camera can convey energy.

How can we manage our nonverbal behavior to make stronger connections? Steck believes video recording ourselves is a painful, yet effective way to assess our own body language and nonverbals.

Film your next presentation. As you watch it afterwards, consider the following:

1. **Vocals:** Was your vocal communication effective? Consider your pitch, pace, and volume. If you're speaking too quickly, practice speaking more slowly. Steck describes vocal variety as the bold, underline, and italics of verbal communication. Make sure that your speech has variety instead of monotony. And avoid reading, which prevents eye contact and connection.

Who do you consider to be the most powerful speakers? What is their pitch, pace, and volume? How might you modify your speech to feel and appear more powerful and confident?

2. **Movement:** Are your movements small and quick? If so, practice moving in ways that are slower, larger, and more confident. Again, think of someone whose physical presence you find engaging. What are they doing with their legs, their posture, and their hands?

Steck believes we need to connect with confident authenticity, which may require adopting new strategies for communicating with our audience.

What is your number one goal for your client interactions? According to Steck, we need to think about connecting with intention, and then modify our physical and verbal behavior so that we feel and are perceived as being confident. According to Steck, if we aren't connecting with our client, we may not be achieving our goals.