

22. Posture, Body Language, and Movement

Your posture, how you move your body, and the subconscious signals telegraphed to others via your body language, are inextricably linked to your emotional state, your perception of any given situation, your own sense of self worth, and the worth that you perceive in those around you. You can tell if a person is insecure or unsure of themselves simply by how they sit, stand, move their body, and use their face. Likewise you know if a person is confident simply by how they stand, gesture, and move across a room.

A comfortable and secure person, completely at ease with himself or herself and confident with their own abilities, inadvertently sends powerful non-verbal signals to those around them. This can be observed at any public gathering. Simply compare a 'wall flower' to the 'life of the party' and you will see the powerful effects of posture, body language, and movement.

The mind/body connection

Your emotional state and your body language are complimentary. That is, your state of mind affects your posture and body movement, just as posture and body movement affects your state of mind. Therefore, understanding and exerting conscious control over your posture and body movement can affect your mental state, which in turn has a direct impact on the level of performance arousal you experience.

A negative cycle

If you move your body in short, quick, erratic, stiff, and more or less uncontrolled motions, you are most likely experiencing anxiety – the negative manifestation of performance arousal – or are well on your way to being there. In this situation, you not only make yourself feel ill at ease, but you also communicate this distress to others, who will more than likely communicate to you (perhaps on a less subtle level) that they would rather not find themselves in your immediate vicinity. Receiving this negative communication from others can then reinforce negative performance arousal, creating a powerful cycle of distress and anxiety.

Breaking the cycle

Some performers are constantly caught up in this cycle, which can become an inherent part of who they are and how they act in everyday situations, affecting not only how they perform, but their social interactions as well. If this sounds a little too familiar, you must take steps to break this cycle! By consciously changing the way in which you move your body, you can exert an influence over your psychological state, which can thereby be perceived by others as being attractive, rather than repulsive. This reaction from others again can lead to a greater sense of confidence, positive

reinforcement, and can thereby strengthen the cycle of positive posture, body language and movement.

Different types of movement

Posture and body movement is fundamental in all of the Eastern martial arts and this is no different in global performance arenas. By simply moving your body in a deliberate, relaxed, flowing, and gentle way, such as in Qi Gong or Tai Chi, you can induce a state of physical and mental calm, control, and at the same time alertness, and can achieve a performance arousal level of 0 or +1 on the performance arousal scale. Slow body movement can be a perfect antidote for performers who often find themselves 'over-hyped', at the positive side of the performance arousal scale, or panicky and anxious, at the negative end of the performance arousal scale.

By executing relaxed yet strong, controlled, deliberate, movements, your body and mind can be activated and optimised for a moderate level of positive performance arousal, perhaps +2 or +3.

And of course by activating your body in large, extravagant, confident, swift, and powerful movements with an unmistakable sense of purpose, such as professional wrestlers prior to and during matches, you can activate a +4 or even +5 performance arousal level.

For certain performing situations, the use of a Cue Card can give a quick and potent reminder for you of posture, body language, and movement.



22. Exercise: Watch and learn

When you are next in a social situation, observe the posture, body language and body movement of those around you. Can you differentiate between those people who are most comfortable, confident, and fully at ease with themselves and the situation, and those people who are least comfortable, confident, and unsure of themselves, purely by reading their body language?

Note the body language of the less comfortable, less confident people. Can you identify something that they are doing with their bodies, expressions, or gestures that you could avoid doing prior to, or during a performance situation?

Now look at the body language of the more comfortable, more confident people. Can you identify something that they are doing with their bodies, expressions, or gestures that you could possibly adopt prior to, or during a performance situation?

Performing in The Zone



Try adopting one or more of these comfortable, confident body motions or postures in your next practise session or performance, if appropriate. How does your practise or performance improve when taking on this posture or carrying out this motion?

This exercise, related to role modelling in Chapter 27, can have a profound effect on the level of performance arousal you experience. Improving your body language, posture and the quality of your physical movement can help you to optimise your level of performance arousal, getting you closer to performing in The Zone.