



Placating



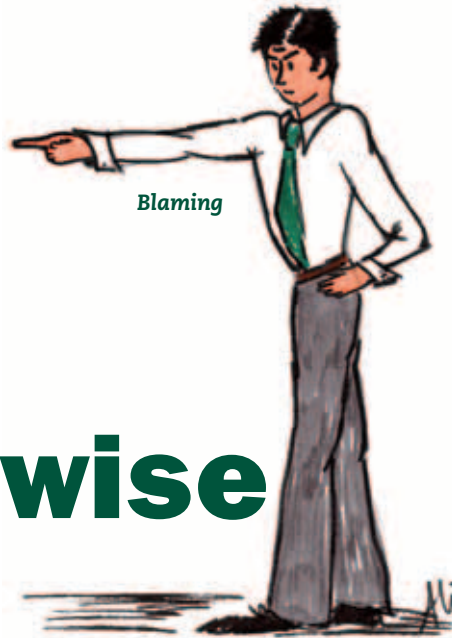
Computing



Distracting



Levelling



Blaming

# Streetwise Body Language

NLP defines a number of communication categories. **Richard Churches** and **Roger Terry** explain how to use these to develop rapport with individuals and with groups.

**V**irginia Satir, one of the world's leading family therapists, was 'modelled' by Richard Bandler and John Grinder (the founders of NLP). She observed that people use five basic language categories and identified body positions that usually accompany these: **Blaming, Placating, Computing, Distracting** and **Levelling**. A sixth, recently identified category is **Sequencing**. People will use a mixture of these in communication, although we all have a preference for one or more. Knowing the effect of Satir positions and language on others is a powerful way to have a positive effect and ensure impact and influence.

## Blaming

The Blaming person tends to want to shift responsibility. They will often point their finger and use stiff gestures. Their language will be full of generalisations. They use phrases which include 'all', refer to only part of an experience or make value judgements that omit to mention the speaker (e.g. 'Boys shouldn't cry' – the response to which might be 'who says that?').

## Top Tips

1. use Levelling, not Blaming, for instructions when you are teaching;
2. never use Placating if a class is difficult, as it says "I do not want authority in this situation";
3. do use Placating when contradicting an opinion that is not correct, as this will make your opinion more easily received;
4. use Levelling in a meeting or one-to-one conversation to hold attention;
5. use Computer to encourage thinking and questioning;
6. if you do not know what to do first, go to Computing;
7. always avoid Distracting when seeking to communicate clearly.

Excellent communicators have proficiency in all of the categories

### Placating

The Placating person is the Blamer's counterpart. They seek sympathy and they may even accept the blame for just about everything. Their body language is not forceful and will often include the palms up 'Placater' position. They will express themselves by talking about how they 'should' or 'can't' do something to trigger a guilt response in others. They may use verbs in a way that is vague (e.g. 'If only you knew').

### Computing

The Computing person uses language and body postures that hide emotions. They are dissociated from the situation and can appear cold or unfeeling. In their language they will talk much of 'you' and 'one'. They often say things that are value judgements without indicating who could have made the judgement. The effect of which is to imply that everyone would agree (e.g. 'It's not good to be strict' or 'one must agree that...').

### Distracting

The Distracter will switch quickly between the three positions above. They may be seeking to cause confusion to distract attention from themselves or could be internally confused. In their language they will often fail to refer clearly to what they are talking about (e.g. 'Nobody knows what's going on') or use other generalisations.

### Levelling

The Leveller will use grounded positions that allow them to come across as 'on the level', centred and factual. Their body posture communicates the idea that they are being true to what they think (palms pressing down at mid-body height). This posture has a calming effect on the physiology of not only the leveller, but also those that see it. Even one-handed, this position holds people's attention. There are few negative things to say about this posture. However, people who do not want to hear the truth may challenge it. Over-used it can lead to disinterest and boredom.

### Sequencing

The Sequencer uses measured sequential movements in line with the middle of their body. Often their hands will be positioned vertically and move in steps horizontally from the sides to the centre of their body. They will use similar language to the Computer person, and appear unemotional and thoughtful, yet logical. Although this is not one of Satir's original categories, it is a useful additional tool, particularly for teachers, trainers and leaders.

Have a go at saying the same thing using the hand gestures from each of the above communication styles and discover what the impact is on

your own internal state. Think about what the impact might be on other people. Also, notice how the sense of what is communicated changes in each style. A good phrase to try out is 'how do you know?' Once you have done this, have fun – tell a joke using these categories and see what the response is. **TEX**

## Building rapport with body language – getting started

### With individuals

When people are in rapport they will adopt similar body positions and gestures. By 'matching' or 'mirroring' another person you can build rapport. In 'matching' you do exactly the same as the other person (i.e. both people have right leg crossed over left). In 'mirroring' you are just that, a mirror. Matching the type of sensory words that people use (e.g. Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic) also builds rapport.

### Warnings

- be subtle and avoid mimickery (people may notice);
- if you match a Blaming person you will get an argument (the best position to use is Placater);
- if you match a Placating person you may end up in a whingeing contest.

### With Groups (presentations or teaching)

To build group rapport, get the whole audience to do the same thing (i.e. raise their hands, laugh etc.).

### Use Satir positions with groups in the following ways

- using all of the categories will help you to establish rapport with the whole audience;
- use Blaming sparingly and only to make a strong point (avoid pointing at the audience; point at the ceiling, floor, whiteboard or self);
- use Placating for sympathy or to weigh up possibilities.
- use Distracter for fun;
- use Levelling when being frank or to convince;
- use Computing to suggest dissociated logic or encourage thinking and questioning;
- if you do not know what to do first, go to Computing.

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## Yes you will... no I won't!

Roger and Richrd's next article (**TEX Issue 11**) will explore how you can manage the assumptions embedded in the language that you use and explore the language patterns that influence behaviour and create group rapport.