

ACE WOMEN'S Network™ Michigan

Mentoring Mondays
October 26, 2020

Looking further into the habits that professional women need to break, this week's focus is on body language (non-verbal) as well as the verbal messages that we are sending.

Habit 9: Minimizing

As our co-author, Sally Helgensen, observed while in a crowded meeting room at a national conference, women and men responded differently to the arrival of late-comers to the meeting. Not surprising, right? Here's what she witnessed: "Virtually every woman acknowledged newcomers by signaling that there was sufficient room for them to get comfortable. They pointed out empty seats, scooted their chairs aside to create more space, or found new seats for themselves at the room's periphery. They also made themselves physically smaller, pressing their legs together, holding their arms against their sides, shoving their purses under the table – even positioning their notepads more squarely in front of them. The men reacted differently. They nodded acknowledgement – or not – but made no attempt to take up less space. . . . They stayed as they were, trusting the newcomers, all accomplished adults, to figure out their own seating accommodations."

You might interpret the women's actions as welcoming, inclusive, and attuned to the needs of others. You might want to re-think this interpretation. "As research conducted by social scientists and neuroscientists confirms, when you draw in your arms and legs, tighten your body, hunker down, or move aside, you undermine your ability to project authority and power. . . . Your physical attempt to shrink sends a message to your brain that you really shouldn't be occupying your space . . . so you don't belong . . . others are more deserving than you. However, unintended or well-intended, the desire to welcome a newcomer, when you try to make yourself smaller, sends a subservient message to everyone in the room."

Aside from body language, the actual language/words that we use have a minimizing affect. Examine the following phrases:

- I *just* need a *quick* minutes of your time;
- I *just* have a *small* observation;
- You may have *already* thought about this;
- I *only* have one *tiny* suggestion.

“These verbal tics are usually employed at the start of a statement, where they are calculated to do the most harm.” Minimizers convey uncertainty and can also undermine your authority.

Other examples of minimizing behaviors include: speaking in soft tones, quietly entering a room, avoid making eye contact, the use of “we” as opposed to “I” when referring to your accomplishments, and on and on. This chapter is so full of information that it almost warrants two entries, but I will leave you with the desire to read it for yourself.

To secure your copy of ***“How Women Rise”*** by Sally Helgensen and Marshall Goldsmith, visit www.hatchettbooks.com.