



The 90% Non-Verbal Factor

It may come as a surprise that if you googled "non-verbal" right now, you would discover ten million websites, including: non-verbal dictionaries, trainings, Ph.D. programs, and journals.

You can tell that the non-verbal has become mainstream because there are now Non-Verbal Learning Disability Associations around the country. One of their main goals is to identify children (and adults) with NLD and provide help for them, their parents, and their teachers.

Because the realm of the non-verbal was not integrated into our basic education, we all show some of the symptoms. Here are some of the social, emotional, and cognitive signs that are of special interest for anyone who seeks accomplishment:

- An impairment in the practical use of language.
- A problem with social skills, especially ability to interact appropriately.
- A limited ability to adapt or adjust to new situations.
- Emotional instability.
- Difficulty with generalizing information.
- Difficulty in assimilating and processing new information or ideas.
- Difficulty in organizing, prioritizing, and planning.

I am sure that you are all familiar with the communication studies that report that your real impact comes not from your words alone, but from what you are saying non-verbally with your gestures, posture, movements, use of space, facial expressions, and tone of voice. The statistics vary but 10% verbal / 90% non-verbal is a common finding.

However, it is interesting to note that communication trainings, by and large, are predominately verbal. This brings up the possibility that we may be encountering the Law of Diminishing Returns. It is as though we have invested 10,000% of effort in the 10% and almost nothing in the 90% non-verbal domain.

We believe that just a small amount of new learning in this under-explored realm translates exponentially in terms of learning, skill, and effectiveness.

We also believe that the 90% Non-Verbal Factor applies to the arenas of attitude, presence, and style.

It might surprise you to know that the non-verbal includes much more than what we call the "physical." As the research in Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities reveals, the non-verbal includes social skills as well as the cognitive function.

Visual thinking is non-verbal thinking. Some people make decisions based on “It smells right.” Mathematical thinking requires both verbal and non-verbal processing.

Have you ever noticed that we speak about visualizing a goal or seeing a solution as though they are non-physical events?

As an experiment, think of something you can do without your body.

You move with it. You feel with it. You think with it. You relate with it. You even intuit with it.

When we think of the body we usually think of the senses. If you look in an anatomy text, you will discover that the senses are categorized as external and internal.

Examples of the external are the senses of sight and hearing for visual and auditory processing. Because of the way the nerve fibers connect to the brain, the external senses reach consciousness directly.

The internal senses, which include equilibrium, proprioception or the ability to sense the position and tension in your muscles, tendons, and joints, and visceroreception or the inputs from our internal organs reaches consciousness more indirectly.

These senses provide us with a tremendous amount of data, but in a form that very few of us have been trained to recognize, interpret, and utilize.

If systems theory is correct, you are a system. This implies that each of your system functions influences each other.

That is, how you think influences how you feel which in turn influences how you move which influences how you think.

The question emerges: Which of these functions offers the greatest return for the investment of resources?



Albert Einstein said, “Nothing happens until something moves.”

This echoes the Chinese view that the Tao is like movement.

The musician and Sufi teacher, Inayat Khan, said, “A movement can make an impression on the person who sees it or on the one who makes it, an effect which can automatically work to form a destiny in their lives.”

As to its value for us, Martha Graham, one of the founders of modern dance, said, “Movement never lies.”