E-Body Language: Decoded

Michelle Semski
Academic Advisor
Bryant & Stratton College Online

Introduction and Background

- 2 years at Niagara University
  - Graduate Assistant in Campus Activities
  - Facilitator of First Year Experience seminar
  - College of Arts and Sciences outreach
  - **Face to face contact with students**
- 3 Years at Bryant & Stratton College Online
  - Academic Advisor
  - **Virtual and electronic contact with students**
- Robert Whipple
  - "Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online"

Face-to-Face vs. Virtual

- Facial Expressions
- Eye Contact
- Body Language
- Vocal Tone
- Instant Reaction
- Conversation pace
- Actual words – less crucial

- Focus is on the actual word
- No control of the tone
- No control over viewers
- Relative timeframe
- Instant Documentation
- All cues are visual

Face to Face Communication

Virtual Communication

"Yeah, Right."

E-Body Language

- Clear Message Objective
- Write Less
- Set the Tone
- Watch Your Emotions

Objective

- Keep a clear purpose
- Start with the subject
    - Why should your message be read?
    - Is there an action to be taken
- When responding…
    - Answer the question
    - Aim to resolve
- Authors of email clutter are ignored
    - Limit email blasts
- Forwarding messages

Write Less

▸ Stay to the point
  ◦ Make important information easy to find
  ◦ Keep your objective in the first few sentences
▸ Format paragraphs to create flow
  ◦ Avoid large blocks of text
  ◦ Space out multiple objectives
▸ Use bullets when possible
▸ Create links to additional information

Set the Tone

- Start the message positive
  - "Thank you for your message"
  - "It's great to hear from you"
  - Show appreciation for the student's initiative
- Clip-Art and Emoticons
  - Use sparingly
  - Can create a positive tone
  - Mind your audience
- Avoid sarcasm
  - You cannot predict how the reader will interpret

Watch Your Emotions

- Complaints and grievances
- Encourage logic
- Written emotion = loss of credibility
- Review messages carefully
- Mind who is reviewing the message
  - Respect the students emotion and privacy
- Take a break if necessary

The 3 T's of E-Body Language

- Tone

- Timing

- Tension

Tone

- Positive
- Use Emoticons or clip art when appropriate
- Pronoun Overuse
  - "You" can relay blame and criticism
  - "I" and "me" can relay egotistical
  - "we" and "they" can show lack of accountability
- Absolute statements
  - Remember emails are a document
- ALL CAPS IS NEVER OKAY

Timing

- Timelines are relative
  - To sender and recipient
  - Email internet delays
  - Other messages sent/received
- Some emails are better answered with a call
- Mind when you are sending information
  - Busy times of the semester
- Give a clear response time
- Do not fear deadlines

Tension

- Conflict is inevitable
- Avoid opening the door
  - "See Below"
  - "Let me make this clear…"
- Acknowledge opinions and feelings
- Offer positive options when possible
- Evaluate the situation
  - Is an email appropriate?
  - Can I consult a different department?
  - Can I refer the student to more assistance?
- Don't fuel the fire

Extinguishing E-mail Fires

- Advisor Role in the student experience
  - Build a sense of responsibility
  - Foster professional growth
- Be explicit, specific and beware
  - Confrontational phrases
  - Give exact details to avoid misinterpretation
- When all else fails...Call
  - Use a different medium
  - Instantly changes the tone

Conclusion and Best Practices

- Mind your:
  - Tone
  - Timing
  - Tension
- Keep an open mind
- Beware of opening the door to confrontation
- Stick to the Objective
- Give good news whenever possible!
- For more information:
  - Robert Whipple: http://www.leadergrow.com/about-us