

POWER POSES

Your body posture **CAN** impact your emotional state.

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Have you ever found yourself making an assumption about someone based entirely on what they look like? I'm not talking about summing up a person by the clothes they're wearing, that's not what I mean.

What I mean is, have you ever judged someone by how they were carrying themselves?

And before you say, 'No, I'd NEVER judge someone based on how they look!' let's try a little experiment.

Close your eyes and picture someone walking into the room. Imagine this person hunched forward and frowning, looking down at the floor. They sit down in a chair and cross their ankles while also folding their arms across their chest. Their head down and their eyes looking down at the floor.

What kind of reaction are you having to this person? Do you want to talk to them? Do you want to find out more about them?

Now picture that very same person walking into that very same room. But this time, they are standing up tall and smiling – teeth and all – and looking right at you. They sit down in a chair, plant both feet on floor and raise their arms to clasp their hands behind their head, still looking at you with a big smile.

What kind of reaction are you having to this person? Do you want to talk to them? Do you want to find out more about them?

I would definitely want to get to know the person from the second scenario! I'll admit it – I would be put off by the body language exhibited by the person in the first scenario.

Would you?

Body language tells us a lot about people. That's not news to you, I'm sure. But what may surprise you is that **YOUR OWN** body language tells **YOUR OWN** mind how to feel. Your posture literally sets the stage for your emotions.



Consider the case of Amy Cuddy.

This Harvard Business School social psychologist is famous for a TED talk promoting the idea that “a person can, by assuming two simple one-minute poses, embody power and instantly become more powerful.” The so-called “power pose” is characterized by “open, expansive postures.” Cuddy and her collaborators report that such posing can change your mood by changing hormone levels.

When you’re in a “closed” position, like the one we described in the first scenario with ankles and arms crossed in front of your body – you’re in a low power pose. Your stress hormone, cortisol, increases and your confidence-building hormone, testosterone, decreases. (Yes, ladies, you have testosterone too). Other lower power poses can include placing a hand over your neck, slumping forward at the table, even standing with feet and arms crossed in front of your body.

When you’re in an “open” position, like the one described in the second scenario with both feet squarely on the ground, arms up and open, and a big smile – you’re in a high power pose. Your cortisol is decreasing rapidly and your testosterone is increasing, making you feel more confident. Other high power poses can include sitting with one ankle crossed over the opposite knee, standing with feet wide apart and hands on hips (many people call this the Wonder Woman pose).

Cuddy describes this theory as:

“Posing in high-power nonverbal displays (as opposed to low-power nonverbal displays) would cause neuroendocrine and behavioral changes for both male and female participants: High-power posers experienced elevations in testosterone, decreases in cortisol, and increased feelings of power and tolerance for risk; low-power posers exhibited the opposite pattern.”

I describe it to my clients in more simple terms:

“It’s hard to feel fired up, confident or excited if you’re slouched down and looking sad. Even if you’re feeling low, stand up tall and hold your head high. If you can do this for two minutes, you will feel much more powerful!” Remember the expression ‘Fake it till you make it’?

So next time you have an important meeting or a job interview, a race or even a training session, check in with yourself about your mood. If it could use a boost, find a place to strike a power pose (I’ve even used a bathroom stall!) for two minutes and I guarantee that you’ll feel more confident to kick butt on whatever lies ahead of you.

Try it and let me know how it goes!

