

Be Exceptional

MASTER THE FIVE TRAITS
THAT SET EXTRAORDINARY
PEOPLE APART

Joe Navarro
with Toni Sciarra Poynter



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Why should anyone follow or respect an adult who throws tantrums, who is emotionally unstable or out of control? We shouldn't. When I've worked for people who have screamed and yelled when things didn't go their way, my colleagues and I had no respect for them, we began to question their instincts, and our productivity suffered as a result.

The first key to emotional regulation is to acknowledge that emotions can and will affect us and learn to recognize when we feel our emotions surging up. Start with some simple questions about your emotional habits:

- › What emotions do I find most challenging to manage (worry/fear, sadness, anger)?
- › What tends to “set me off” (too many tight deadlines, not enough sleep, when x person does or says y , when a certain combination of things happens)?
- › When I'm emotionally hijacked, how do I behave (yelling, saying mean things, sulking, banging things around, withdrawing, unhealthy eating/drinking/drugs)?

Once you have a sense of what sets you off emotionally and how you tend to react, raise your threshold against emotional hijacking by looking for strategies you can implement to deal with stress. This could be an excellent self-apprenticeship, as there's a great deal of scientific study and literature on stress reduction. Or start closer to home:

- › Think about those people you know who handle things well—they don't lose their cool; they stay focused and decisive under pressure; they deal respectfully with others even when their patience is tested.
- › What do they do in these situations? Really observe and be specific here.

- › How might you adapt their strategies to the situations that challenge you emotionally?
- › Look for blog posts, books, and videos that deal with emotional regulation or anger management.
- › Seek professional help in anger management—it can only be beneficial.

One way to understand conscientiousness is to look at how conscientious people behave:

- › They accomplish tasks while being mindful of their responsibilities toward others, the community, and the environment.
- › They're aware of the consequences of their actions.
- › They can delay gratification when other things take precedence.
- › They have the humility to know they're not always right.
- › They are dependable, disciplined, persistent, and well-intentioned.

Before going further, take another look at the list above and ask yourself these two questions:

1. Which of these areas am I strong in?
2. Which ones could I improve on?

Taken together, these traits allow conscientious individuals to be deliberative in their planning and actions. They are able to apply themselves to learning and study and take pleasure in being prepared and organized. They have the ability to start and finish projects, persisting regardless of the obstacles. For them the future is full of possibilities, and they often have a life plan of things they'd like to achieve, do, or see—frequently from a young age. They tend to care about how they appear, exercise good manners, and are empathetic toward others. Their reliability and organization have a positive effect not just on them but on those around them.

We tend to absorb the messages and “rules” of society, institutions, and others that often limit us. I do believe it is possible to let go of those self-restricting expectations. Through your practices, thinking, and behaviors you can rewire your brain, and in so doing change who you are and what you can achieve, and open up yourself to new possibilities.

Take some time to answer these questions honestly:

- › What expectations do others have of me?
- › Do I find these expectations burdensome or motivating?
- › Which ones are in alignment with my own goals and interests?
- › What expectations do I have of myself?
- › Are there ways that I might be limiting my own potential?
- › What training, information, knowledge, or skills would I need to reach my goals and pursue my interests?
- › What, if anything, is holding me back? What could I do to move forward?

Demonology: Appraising the Flaws That Hold Us Back

Often, I ask my audiences to write down what they believe their weaknesses are, or those things they wish they could improve. Some people seem bewildered about what to write down, while others quickly scribble a litany of flaws that rivals a grocery list. In both cases, I wonder how realistically we see ourselves. Could a person really have so few flaws, or so many? Can we see ourselves as we truly are? And if so, what do we do with that information?

The poet and diplomat James Russell Lovell said, “No one can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself.” Exceptional individuals are constructively self-critical. They care about being and doing better. This self-analysis, which I call *demonology*, allows them to set a better course for themselves. Perhaps this explains why you’re reading this book. No matter what your age and life experience, there’s a better world of your own making waiting for you if you’re willing to do the following:

- › Look at yourself realistically.
- › Ponder how you can change.
- › Examine how you view yourself and relate to the world around you.
- › Constructively take steps to constantly rectify or improve your behaviors.

Why go through all this? Because when we begin to change ourselves, we have a positive effect not just on ourselves and our own life satisfaction, but also on others’. That is the foundation of influence.

Self-mastery is both the work and the reward of a life well and wisely lived. I'm on that path. You're on that path also—that is why you are here. As we shape our full potential, we can learn from each other just as I have learned from many. While only you can shape your own future and create that unique scaffolding that reflects your goals and interests, as a fellow traveler and striver on the path to self-mastery, I offer these questions for you to consider within each area we've covered:

Apprenticeship

- › Is there something in your life that you would like to know more about or would love to study further?
- › Would that require formal training, further reading, online lessons, or mentoring?
- › Have you thought about treating yourself to take a lesson, to ask an expert, to try?
- › If you haven't done so, make that a goal. Do the research to find help, and then set a date for starting.
- › What habits could you cultivate that would help you to educate yourself and expose you more fully to what life has to offer? Perhaps reading half an hour a day. Researching a topic of interest. Go to a museum rather than the movies; watch a documentary rather than an action film; take a guided educational vacation. Strike up conversations with a new neighbor. Seek incremental changes that would build those habits that educate you, that help you to experience life more fully.

Emotional Balance

- › What do you do when you are upset? Is that pattern productive, unproductive, or something in between?
- › Have you ever overreacted to a situation and later felt badly about it? If this happens often enough, come up with strategies you think you can use that will work to help you react in a more balanced way.
- › If you find yourself frequently frustrated and angry, down and depressed, or gripped by stress and anxiety, have you considered counseling? There's nothing wrong with checking in with a professional to coach us through difficult times.

Conscientiousness

- › When it comes to kindness, reliability, honesty, and trustworthiness, do you think you could improve in any one of these?
- › What would you need to do to be both better at these and better perceived?
- › Starting today, tell yourself, "I will do these things:
_____ to be more _____."
And just in case you think you are perfect, ask others where they think you should improve.

Untethered

- › Identify some limits or restrictions others have placed on you about your capabilities or potential.
- › Resolve to go out and do just a little bit more.

Demonology

- › What are your demons? Put another way: What are your weaknesses? Make a list.
- › If they bother you or hold you back, what will you do to tackle them? What strategies could you use?
- › Revisit your list every now and then. Have things changed?
- › How do you want to be known? Answer here and now: _____

_____. Live your life then like you mean it.

Self-Discipline

- › In what areas do you lack discipline? (Here again, if you have trouble coming up with ideas, ask someone who knows you well how you could do better in the discipline department.)
- › How would you incrementally change that?
- › What would be a sustainable goal?
- › Would waking fifteen minutes earlier make a difference? How about reading two extra pages from a book per day? Working out with an exercise buddy? Eating smaller portions?

Keeping a log of progress toward specific goals? Tidying up your bed, your room, your kitchen one drawer at a time? Start small.

Order and Priorities

- › Of all the things you have to do each day, what should be a higher priority?
- › Start your own Daily Action List and put your name boldly at the top. This is your commitment to yourself.
- › On your Daily Action List for today, write what you will resolve to accomplish today.
- › Follow through with your Daily Action List for a week, a month, a year, and see if this alone doesn't change how much you get done each day.

Practice (Myelination)

- › Identify something you want to perform better. Is it giving a presentation? Parallel parking? Your jump shot, lifting technique, or swimming stroke? Set up a practice routine by slowing down the process, parsing it into small steps, and practicing each step, not jumping to the next one, until that step is done perfectly. In time, speed it up.
- › If you dread public speaking, practice walking up to the stage confidently. Make eye contact, stop and get your bearings, let the audience get used to you, and begin with a simple, "Good morning." Then stop and do it all over again, until your pacing and your bearing grow in confidence. I heard the great Dame

Helen Mirren once say that walking onto the stage or into a scene is an actor's most difficult challenge. Work at it.

Perseverance

- › Have you stopped doing something you wanted to do, such as writing in a journal, working out, staying in touch with friends, keeping up with current events, volunteering, improving your work or family relationships, saving more money? Whatever it is, dedicate yourself to do it, even if it's just fifteen minutes a day, or taking a tiny step forward in the process.
- › Perseverance is not about big moves and then losing momentum. It's about steadily sticking it out for the long term. As someone once said, the largest seagoing vessel in the world can make a complete circle if you but move the rudder just one degree.
- › It's okay to take a break, but don't allow yourself to be distracted. Get back to it.

Albert Einstein, who knew a thing or two, said, "Try not to become a man of success but a man of value." Self-mastery doesn't come from somehow managing to get things right and succeeding in the moment. That's luck, not self-mastery. Self-mastery comes from days, weeks, months, even years of work, thought, study, and habit. It comes from persisting even when we don't get it right. It comes from making our metaphorical bed in every way that matters. Placing our feet in the blocks every morning. Holding our breath and diving deep even when we aren't sure we can.

Developing the habits of self-mastery is one of the most profound and rewarding ways you can value yourself. You are never too old to learn self-mastery. As you gain mastery over yourself, you gain

mastery over so many other aspects of your life—from your mind to your body to your most noble intentions.

Taking steps toward self-mastery amid the ups and downs of life isn't always easy, but that makes the striving and victory all the more precious. In fact, the beauty of self-mastery is that it is not handed to you. It is earned day by day, and once earned, it cannot be taken away. It's a quest that can profoundly change you for the better. And when you embark on that quest, something even more remarkable happens.

Self-mastery garners the trust, cooperation, and admiration of others—it is the most powerful tool a businessperson can count on repeatedly with the greatest return on investment. No one says, “I want to be like the most average person I can find.” We seek out those who are exceptional so that we can emulate them. We seek out those who have mastery over themselves because they inspire us to better our own lives. Now, *that* is power. That is what we mean by being exceptional. It all begins with self-mastery.

Situational Awareness: Observation Meets Experience

As I leave my house to walk my dog, I smell the air. Dry and brisk. In Florida, this means a cold front is moving in.

I cross the street, glancing about for oncoming traffic and to see who else is around, spotting runners in the distance. Passing the first house on my left, I see lights on inside. Looks like someone got up earlier than usual.

I pass an old Volvo parked not in front of a house but between two houses. Hmm—odd. Everyone on our street parks in their driveway. Leaves and debris are accumulating around the tires. The windshield's dirty. There's quite a bit of rubbish in the front and back seats. The car appears to be abandoned. I wonder why it's here?

Farther along, I notice someone sitting in a car with the engine idling. In the reflected light of her phone, I see it's a woman. She looks at the front door of the nearby house, then back to her phone. She eyes me, looks away. School-age children live in that house. Perhaps she's waiting to give them a ride. A cat stops walking and sinks low to the ground as I near; fortunately, my dog doesn't see her.

This is a daily walk taken with situational awareness. Situational awareness might be described as having three components:

1. Awareness of our environment: sights, sensations, smells, sounds, et cetera
2. Awareness of how individuals are behaving in those environments
3. Awareness of our knowledge base (life experiences, professional training, schooling, self-apprenticeships)

Enlightened awareness allows you to take in everything known and experienced, the old and the new, and through your dedicated and sustained interest, void of prejudice or bias, deepen your understanding. Not perfectly at first, but better and more easily with practice.

In a nutshell, it works like this:

- › You resist the temptation to quickly assign patterns and explanations. This is not the time to try to be the smartest kid in the class and shoot your hand up with the answer. Instead, you pause and let what's coming forward speak to you.
- › Freed of preconceived ideas, you ask neutral questions about what you observe:
 - What am I observing?
 - What might it mean?
 - How does context play into all this?
 - Are there antecedents to take into account?
 - How could it be important and useful?
 - How does this correlate with what I already know?
 - Should I seek more information or knowledge?
 - Can this be improved?
 - Does something need attention?
 - Is everyone comfortable?
 - Will a response be needed?

While there are many books on body language (see the Bibliography and References section), including my own, here are twelve behaviors that I think you'll find immediately useful in any setting, be it at work, among friends, or at home. Of the hundreds of behaviors I discuss in *The Dictionary of Body Language*, these are consequential because they are particularly accurate in letting us know that something's not right, there are concerns, or there's an issue. The exceptional dig deeper when it comes to understanding others, and nothing achieves that quicker than the messages we get from the body that come to us, without exaggeration, at the speed of light. Messages that reveal in real time clues to others' thoughts, doubts, wishes, or apprehension. So here are twelve behaviors that will help you begin to achieve that greater awareness the exceptional seek, at home or in business:

1. **Eyebrow Narrowing/Knitting.** The area between the eyes and just above the nose is called the *glabella*. When the glabella becomes narrow or furrowed, usually there's an issue, concern, or dislike. This universal sign may happen very quickly and can be difficult to detect, but it's an accurate reflection of sentiments. Some people knit their brow when they hear something troubling or are trying to make sense of what they're being told. The sentiment is communicated with the >< emoji.
2. **Eyelid Touching**—Momentary eyelid touching can be a form of eye-blocking coupled with tension relief. Often when people say something they shouldn't have, people nearby will touch or scratch their closed eyelid—this is a good indicator that something improper was uttered. You see this often with politicians when one misspeaks and the other catches it. The longer the fingers touch the eyelids, the greater the stress being felt. Touching of the eyelids actually helps us to self-soothe and release stress.
3. **Covering of Eyes**—Sudden covering of the eyes with a hand or fingers is a blocking/pacifying behavior associated with

a negative event, such as receiving bad news or threatening information. It also indicates negative emotions, worry, or lack of confidence. You may see it in people who've been caught doing something wrong. Interestingly, congenitally blind children, too, will cover their eyes rather than their ears when they hear something they dislike. Clearly this behavior is well established in our ancient circuits to both block incoming information (visual), but the touching or closing of the eyes also serves to pacify or soothe us.

4. **Nose Wrinkling (“bunny nose”).** The signal or cue for disgust usually involves the nose wrinkling upward, while the skin contracts along with the underlying muscle (the nasalis), which is very sensitive to negative emotions. Often this gesture causes the corners of the eyes near the nose to narrow. Starting at roughly three months and sometimes even earlier, babies wrinkle their noses when they smell things they don't like. This disgust cue remains with us all our lives. When we smell or even just see something we don't like, our nasalis muscle contracts involuntarily, revealing our true sentiments.
5. **Lip Compression.** Throughout the day, as we encounter negative events or uncomfortable thoughts or concerns, our lips will press together tightly, accurately transmitting, even if only for an instant, our concerns. This is a quick cue that something's wrong. Lip compression can be very subtle, or dramatic to the point of the lips being compressed so tightly that they disappear.
6. **Pursed Lips.** We purse our lips (compressed tightly toward the front of the mouth) when we disagree with something or when we are thinking of an alternative. When audiences disagree with what's being said or know it's wrong, you often see this behavior. The more dramatic the movement of the pursed lips outward or to the side, the stronger the emotion, which is usually negative or alternative (see Pursed Lip Pull, below).
7. **Pursed Lip Pull.** In this nonverbal the pursed lips are dramatically pulled to the side of the face, significantly

altering how the person looks. Usually this happens quickly and may be held for a few seconds. This is a very emphatic gesture that says, *I have real issues here; I don't like what I was asked, what I just heard, or where this is going.* This nonverbal is highly accurate in telegraphing that there are serious issues. The more dramatic the gesture or the longer it's held, the greater the discomfort or stress.

8. **Jaw Shifting.** Jaw displacement or repetitive jaw shifting from side to side is an effective pacifier. In some people, however, it can simply be a compulsive behavior, so note when and how often it occurs and look for other confirming discomfort displays. Most people do this infrequently, so when you do see it, it's accurate in communicating that something is bothering this person. They have doubts, are unconvinced, or are incredulous.
9. **Covering of Suprasternal Notch.** Touching or covering of the “neck dimple” or suprasternal notch (the indented area of the neck below the Adam's apple and just above the upper chest) indicates concern, issues, worries, insecurities, or fear. Men tend to grab their neck or throat robustly or cover this area with their full hand as they adjust their tie or their collar. Women touch this area more frequently than men and tend to do so more lightly, with their fingertips. Either way, covering the weakest point of the body signifies that something's at issue. Covering our neck when we feel threatened most likely evolved as a result of the countless encounters our species had witnessing acts of predation by large felines that usually go for the neck.
10. **Straight Interlaced Fingers (“teepee hands”).** When stress, anxiety, or fear are high, people will self-pacify by interlacing their fingers and rubbing them slowly against each other. The friction relieves tension by stimulating nerves. This is one of the best indicators that a person is severely stressed. We actually “reserve” this behavior for when things are bad; the rest of the time we wring our hands or rub them together.

11. **Ventilating Behaviors.** When someone asks us to do something or asks a question and we have to ventilate to answer—by lifting our clothing, pulling on our collar, adjusting our socks, et cetera—we’re communicating that something’s bothering us. Our skin temperature can change in less than a fourth of a second. We ventilate to cool off without consciously thinking about it, which often reveals that something’s amiss or disconcerting.
12. **Ankle Quiver.** Some people repetitively twist or quiver their ankle (side to side) in a show of restlessness, animosity, irritation, or anxiety. It’s usually seen when the person is standing, which can make the whole body shake—it’s quite noticeable to others, while most people doing it are oblivious.

As you begin to practice observing for nonverbals, keep these points in mind:

- › **Nonverbals reveal much, but they don’t reveal everything.** We may never know what causes a behavior, but we can observe it happening and we can note what preceded it. This gives us an opportunity to further observe, to ask, and if necessary, as the Ritz Carlton manager did, to intervene.
- › **When in doubt, believe the body.** I have learned in my forty-plus years of experience that if there’s a conflict between what is said verbally and what’s transmitted nonverbally, believe the body. It’s almost always the more candid communicator. Why? Because before we had spoken language, we had body language. This has been our primary means of communication for millennia. So, when we cringe at being asked to work late and then override that by saying, “Happy to do it,” that negative reaction is far more accurate than those subsequent words of compliance.
- › **Boil it down to the comfort/discomfort equation.** It can seem confusing when you first start observing nonverbals. You

may see multiple nonverbals and not be sure what to make of them. Try to clear your mind of assumptions and just note what you're seeing. Then ask yourself: *Am I seeing comfort or discomfort?* Concentrate only on that at first. Simply assessing for comfort and discomfort can take you far, because in essence we are very binary in how we communicate.

Once you get a feel for that, work on mastering and validating one or two behaviors—for instance, neck touching and lip pulling—so that when you see them you don't have to think about them. You immediately know something isn't right or the person is thinking of something else.

Bottom line: Whether in business, at home, or in relationships, one observational skill you can put to use immediately and see equally immediate real-time results is to simply always assess for comfort and discomfort. That's the key to reading body language.

As you improve at assessing for comfort and discomfort, you can go further, trying to gauge what others might be thinking, feeling, or intending, or what a given situation might mean. Here are just a few of the insights we may have on any given day, simply from observing nonverbals:

Danger—Is that person following me again?

Legitimacy—Yes, I see he's in his UPS uniform and the UPS truck is outside.

Insecurities—Harold looks worried; he's wringing his hands.

Hierarchy—Look who's sitting next to the boss today.

Concerns—Those pursed lips are telling me we're not going to make the deadline.

Fears—Sure are lot of students biting their nails before the exam.

Accessibility—Good luck trying to get a meeting with her; her office door is always closed.

Respect—She rolls her eyes whenever anyone disagrees with her.

Desires—Look at how those two look at each other; they are so into each other.

Preening—He keeps fiddling with his watch and tugging at his shirt sleeve . . . he sure cares about how he looks.

Grooming—He is so concerned about his hair being just right.

Pensiveness—I wouldn't go in there right now; he's stroking his chin; that means he's probably working on next week's schedule.

Worry—She is constantly touching her neck; she must really need to ace this test.

Imagine growing your knowledge base far beyond this short list through your ability to observe. You can! People say knowledge is power. What is knowledge, if not the accumulation of observations, pooled to form a deep reservoir of understanding?

That is precisely what exceptional people know how to develop and then draw upon in real time. They do it through enlightened awareness born of observation.

Exercises to Strengthen Your Powers of Observation

Ever drive to an unfamiliar location or are driving around endlessly looking for parking, and you find yourself feeling stressed, perhaps even exhausted? You might not have realized that your exhaustion is from having to observe, not just look, and be situationally aware for a sustained period when most of us aren't accustomed to doing it for more than a few minutes.

Even with training, it can be taxing to walk into new situations and try to take everything in. I remember my first week in the Manhattan office of the FBI. I was twenty-five and newly arrived from

Yuma, Arizona, where a heavy traffic day was four cars waiting at a red light. This densely packed city of seven million was overwhelming my ability to observe.

Fortunately, an older agent took me around and helped me transition from looking and experiencing sensory overload to observing.

One day, we walked up to East Fifty-First Street, where he showed me how to spot pickpockets. They worked in groups, dressed dissimilarly. They'd suddenly stop on the sidewalk, forcing people to bump into them. In that confused instant, someone from behind would steal whatever was accessible from a handbag or a back pocket. The subway pickpockets worked alone, focused on men in suits reading papers. They would slowly back into them as if distracted. Then, when the subway car doors opened, in the rush of people getting out, they'd use one finger to push the wallet up from the victim's trouser pocket, while the other fingers lifted the wallet out.

Once I knew what to look for, it was hard to miss what previously would easily have slipped under the radar. Eventually, building on those experiences, I learned to observe how spies behaved. That took my observation and situational awareness skills to a whole new level. Nothing like working counterespionage to train you to look for the smallest of details, such as a suspect walking on the inside of the sidewalk against buildings to hide in the open; or the increased need to look at his watch because he must be at precisely the right place and time, otherwise the fleeting transaction is off; or the slightly more erect walk as an overactive limbic brain through the sympathetic system keeps vigilance in flight-or-flight mode.

Learning how to observe is one thing; practicing and maintaining your observation skills is something else. Observation is a perishable skill that needs to be developed and practiced. As one trauma room surgeon revealed to me, "When they bring in a car-crash victim with severe internal trauma, I have only minutes to avert a death. How quickly I do my job is based on my skill at observing the signs and finding my way through the thoracic cavity. When I came back from maternity leave, I felt sluggish my first day

back in the ER—in a few months my skills had become rusty.” The same thing can happen in business. When we are out of practice, or distracted, we lose our observational skill.

Situational awareness is exhausting if you aren’t used to it or force yourself to do it for extended periods without preparation. But if you do it every day, it becomes easy to build observational strength and stamina as you would a muscle.

Some of these exercises may not be familiar to you and may strike you as odd, but they’re worth your time and effort. Some might feel easier than others—just as some activities come more easily to you than others. All will become easier with practice. With some patience and dedication, there’s no reason why you can’t significantly sharpen your skills as an observer.

So, get up, have some fun, and learn a few tricks or hacks for expanding your observational skills.

Exercise: Identifying Your Visual Range

- › **Stand outside or in a large room, eyes forward.** Pick an object or a spot in the distance or on a wall in front of you and focus on that. Take some quiet breaths and try to relax your facial muscles and the muscles around your eyes. At all times keep your focus on the object or spot you’ve selected.
- › **Now lift your arms out to each side to form a T shape, arms level with your shoulders.** You may feel your eyes twitching left and right to see what’s out to the sides. That’s normal at first, but concentrate on looking at the spot you chose in front.
- › **Keeping your eyes straight ahead but relaxed, slowly bring your hands forward, gently wiggling your fingers as you do so.**
- › **Stop moving your hands and fingers as soon as you can comfortably see them while still looking ahead at that preselected spot.** That is your *peripheral vision*. Everything from where you see your hands to directly in front of you is

your *visual range*. You'll be surprised how far to the side your eyes can see even while focused on something in front.

Your peripheral vision will at first lack detail, but it will detect movement. That alone can be quite effective: peripheral vision can discern, at a four-way stop, which vehicle got there first or who is moving faster.

You'll be able to identify things in the center of your visual range more accurately than things out to the sides. This is natural in the sense of seeing things cognitively—but be aware that your subconscious is also processing information, though you may not be aware of it.

Repeat this exercise once or twice a day for a week so you develop the confidence that you'll be able to spot things out of the corner of your eye. This is how I trained myself to look at someone in front of me while talking to them but also see what everyone else is doing at the very edge of my visual range. This also helps you to scan a room more quickly and to not make it obvious when you are trying to observe something or someone.

Exercise: Scanning

- › Once again, relax your facial muscles as you look straight ahead at a distant object, with arms extended in a T shape.
- › Now, have someone flash a picture or a card with a word or a few words written on it near the edge of your visual range. You'll be tempted to look directly. Resist, relax, and keep your eyes straight ahead.
- › As you continue to focus forward, have the person begin to move the object slowly toward the front of your body in stages. When the image or word is perfectly clear to you, tell them to stop. When and where that happens will depend on whether it's a picture, a word, or series of words.

You'll notice that the more relaxed your eyes and body are, the more the object or words eventually begin to reveal themselves. Objects near the edge of your visual range will never be crystal clear, but this exercise begins to prepare you to observe a greater area without having to look at it directly.

This exercise shows you how narrow our acute visual range is, compared to our overall range of vision. Most of what we observe in life is coming in out of focus—and that's okay. Our brain can still discern much, even if it's fuzzy. We walk, drive, and go about our lives every day with many things a little blurry—our subconscious busily sorts things out. It allows us to glance and look—in essence, to function. But to really observe, one must focus.

How do we do that, especially if we're looking at a large area such as the outdoors, where there's a great deal to focus on? We scan.

Scanning for Information

Scanning is key to faster, more comprehensive observation when there's much to look at—be it a pilot looking to find a small craft in a vast ocean or a speaker addressing a hundred attendees. It allows you to take in more information at a glance than trying to focus on one thing at a time, as we're prone to do.

If you did the previous exercise, you realize that there's much we can take in on the margin of our visual range and that our eyes will pick up on behaviors, in the case of an audience, or on a speck of debris in an ocean, if we scan—and faster than with overly focused looking—which is important for situational awareness.

The key to scanning is to keep the eyes moving. Depending on where you are, that may also require that you move your head to cover a larger area. If you're talking to a group, you may think this means focusing on each face in the audience one at a time, but that is not scanning. Scanning requires you to keep the eyes moving—whether back and forth, left to right, up and down—everyone does it differently.

As you scan, your subconscious brain will register the facial features and general body language of the audience. Your brain has this capacity.

After you've scanned the room—let's say it's a small audience—a few times, you can relax a little more and slow down so the muscles of the eyes are not overworked and you don't look odd. As you scan back and forth more slowly, you're taking in even more information, which your brain can now contrast with what you saw earlier.

Try practicing scanning in different settings, such as when walking down hallways as you see people coming toward you, or when you're waiting for an appointment or meeting and watching others pass by. Especially at first, you may find you have to scan several times to pick up details you missed initially. Rest assured your eyes are picking up a lot of information before you consciously realize it.

You can even practice stationary scanning of another person. Suppose you're talking to a business colleague in close proximity. You can scan without moving your eyes. As you talk, without breaking eye contact, ask yourself questions like: What color shoes are they wearing? Are they moving their feet? What are the hands doing? Are they fidgeting? What kind of watch are they wearing? Is there a pen in the pocket and if so what kind? If the woman is wearing a scarf, what is the design? If you're doing this right and your eyes are relaxed, you shouldn't have to look down at the person's feet to see their shoes or directly at their wrist to see the watch. You are using your mental focus to target (scan) specific areas the eyes see in front and in the periphery, without moving the eyes. Try it out with business colleagues and you'll find over time that you can converse while also gathering ever more visual details as you chat. That sudden pulling of the collar (a ventilating behavior) when a political topic comes up will cue you that there are issues there to be avoided. When someone in a group shifts their jaw in response to a question, you'll have an opportunity to assess whether there's more there to be explored. When in the middle of a

conversation your colleague orients her foot toward the exit, you'll know that she's signaling she needs to leave, and you can begin to wrap things up.

As you practice scanning, don't fixate on any one object (unless of course you must). Give yourself the latitude to take it all in. You'll soon be surprised at how much information you can absorb in two or three quick scans of your environment. If you're scanning while walking outside, if something moves or is coming your way, even in your peripheral vision, you'll be able to better spot it as you're forcing your eyes, radarlike, to cover a wider peripheral area.

It's easy and fun to practice scanning in daily life. In a restaurant or anywhere people are gathered, do a quick scan and guess how many people are present.

In the beginning you may be way off—maybe there are only twelve people when you thought there were twenty. But with practice, your brain will learn to do this calculation by seeing, not counting. No, you're not guessing. You're letting your subconscious do the heavy lifting of doing the actual calculation.

Eventually with one quick scan, you'll be able to see precisely how many people there are without having to count each one individually. Try it. As your brain begins to adapt to this new way of looking at the world, your eyes in conjunction with your brain will pick up even greater detail.

Scanning People

I'm asked all the time: How do you do it? How do you know what everyone is doing in a circle of colleagues? It's easy, once you learn to scan and not stare. You can practice scanning for facial features, movements, foot behaviors, and any other nonverbal behaviors of consequence.

One of the benefits of scanning is that it's a way to observe people without being intrusive. If I look at you too often or for too long, it will affect how you feel about me and thus how you behave. If people

think you're staring at them, they'll naturally become suspicious and tense. So we avoid intrusive observation by not looking at people directly, but rather by scanning: we glance *by* them by keeping our eyes moving rather than focusing for too long.

Try this technique first with family members or people you are close to. If it's done correctly, they shouldn't notice anything different about you. If they do, then something needs to be corrected because it should be a natural look on your part as you smoothly scan from person to person.

Or you can practice it this way. Have someone find an interesting ten to fifteen seconds of a movie you haven't seen and play it for you at twice the speed. I like short scenes where people are contemplating an issue, where bad news is received, or when someone learns a truth that has long been concealed. Explain what you think you saw and what was going on in the sped-up clip. Now check to see how much you got right. You can make this a game and take turns, each of you practicing your scanning skills using film clips to see who sees the most accurately.

Do this enough times with different scenes and different movies, and you'll find that you stop focusing on faces and start scanning. As you develop this skill, in time you'll be able to read the faces as well as what else is happening in the scene, and to articulate your observations with greater clarity.

Exercise: The Color Order Game

Try this exercise the next time you drive into a parking lot:

- › **Scan left and scan right and notice the vehicle colors without focusing on each car.**
- › **After you've parked, ask yourself:** What were the colors of the first three cars on the left and the first three cars on the right, and in what order did they appear?

At first you may have difficulty with this. But with practice, your accuracy will increase. Eventually you can build up to remembering the colors of the first six or seven cars on each side, having only scanned them once. But keep practicing if you want to keep your edge.

Exercise: Observing Without Seeing

- › **Sit outside, making sure your arms are exposed, and close your eyes.**
- › **Now, simply listen.** You might feel tense or find it hard to settle at first. That will pass. You're missing visual stimuli—that's because your enormous visual cortex, about the size of your fist, is demanding to be fed. You can override that. Take a deep breath and exhale.
- › **Listen to your own breathing.** Spend some time just with this awareness.
- › **When you feel more relaxed, keeping your eyes closed, shift your attention from the sound of your breathing to the sounds of the world around you.** See if you can name all the sounds you hear, and where they're coming from. Do some noises seem to emanate from one place? Are some coming toward you or moving away from you? Soon you'll be putting the need to look aside and will be able to identify sounds and pinpoint their location. Exhale again. Keep those eyes closed.
- › **Now, bring your attention to the movement of the hairs on your face, neck, head, and arms.** The smallest and thinnest of hairs on your body will be stimulated as the wind blows, the temperature changes, vehicles pass, or people move about you. See if you can sense the difference between each—the long, steady brush of the wind versus the sudden pressure from a passing truck, for instance. In time, you'll sense when someone walks near you or even enters a room, if you allow yourself the pleasure of observing with your eyes closed.

Yes, you can observe with your eyes closed. You have sensors in the form of nerves all over your body. These nerve endings sense moisture, heat, noises, odors, pressure, air movement, vibrations—all sorts of things. This was impressed upon me one memorable day when I found myself in an elevator during an earthquake. My senses were overwhelmed; vibrations competed with sounds, my clothes shook on my body, stimulating nerve endings in a way I'd never experienced before, and the earth's tremors came up through my feet, making my feet tremble even as the elevator descended quickly and the rush of air through small openings around the door further added to the moment. So much information was coming in that I had to freeze in place to figure out what was happening as all my sensors seemed to go off at once in ways that were completely unfamiliar. Perhaps there was a time in your life when you experienced a similar sensory overload.

As with the other exercises, you can take sensory observation practice on the road. If you're waiting for someone in a restaurant, resist the urge to check your phone. Lower your eyelids and just listen. What sounds do you hear? Where are they coming from? What about in the doctor's office? Sitting on a bench in the museum? Or in familiar places where we tend to tune out: Your workplace? Your bedroom, just after you wake up? Your backyard?

And when was the last time you exercised your nose? When you enter a vehicle, what do you smell? An elevator? A hotel room? How about when you enter a food store, a clothing store, a hardware store, a gas station, a pharmacy? What are the scents and odors, strong and subtle? Can you smell when a weather front is moving in? You'd be surprised what you can pick up if you pay attention.

The moment you begin to do these observation exercises and games, you start to strengthen those synapses that help you observe and collect information. As you develop your scanning ability for environments, activity, and nonverbals, you'll begin to be able to assess the multiple inputs you're receiving at any given moment. On the

street, for instance: What time is it (without looking at your watch or your phone)? Where is the sun in relation to you? Who else is near you? How many cars are there?

In the office, you'll be able to quickly scan the faces of everyone arriving for a meeting: Who's smiling and cheerful? Who looks troubled, tired, or is avoiding eye contact? It's not for you to make judgments about them but merely to observe the information they're transmitting. The principles of benign curiosity should apply. We are assessing for available information that suggests, but in itself shouldn't be viewed as conclusive (in Chapter 5, I'll share a model for reaching clearer conclusions as we interact with others). Let every person you see speak to you nonverbally as you scan quickly. In time, you'll be able to decode their nonverbals faster and faster.

The more you exercise your observation skills, the more proficient you'll become. But to get (and stay) there, you have to practice. Otherwise, just like shooting baskets or playing the piano, your skills diminish.

So test yourself and keep practicing. Turn it into a game. Open up worlds of understanding in the world you encounter every day: master the wonderful skill of observation.

Ten Ways to Speak with More Than Words

Words matter. But when it comes to demonstrating that we genuinely care, it's our nonverbal communication that carries most of the load. If you have a way with words, by all means use it. But from the smile we find so welcoming from the time we are infants to the tone of voice that transmits our joy in seeing someone, to the exquisitely sensitive response we have, nerve by nerve, when someone simply rubs our back or holds our hand when we are scared, sad, or sick—caring begins and ends nonverbally. Below are ten examples of nonverbals that make indelible positive impressions. At the very least, they may warm a cool or skeptical reception. At most, they'll steer you smoothly onto the road of rapport-building.

1. **Small gestures mean much.** The gestures we use to welcome others, the gracious manners that make them feel special and comfortable, all fall under the umbrella of nonverbal communication.

That small signal you give—perhaps just a wave of the hand or flashing the eyes by quickly raising your eyebrows at someone you know across the street—lets them know you care. Your arms can make others feel included, too; your outstretched hand toward a person who approaches while you're talking with someone says, *Come, join us; be part of what we're sharing.*

Even our feet convey inclusivity. Usually when we talk to others, everyone's toes are directly facing each other. Though we may turn at the hips to greet others, it's when the feet angle out that we make others feel really welcome to join us.

Exceptional individuals literally go out of their way to make others feel comfortable and let them know that they care. Taking a moment to walk over to greet someone or to say hello to a group can mean so much, especially if you are a manager, senior executive, or CEO.

2. **Be prompt.** Make sure you communicate in a timely manner. This is so important in business. We demonstrate that we value others when we attend to them and communicate quickly. This is part of rapport-building and validation: if it's important for them, it's important for us. No one, and I mean no one, likes to wait long for a response. Some people procrastinate on saying no. Rest assured, a timely no is far better than a slow one, or no response at all. Bad news, too, shouldn't be delayed, once you clearly understand what needs to be communicated.
3. **Let them vent.** If emotions are high and there's tension, one of the best ways to diffuse things is to let them vent. Remember the primacy of emotions—that before we can soothe with words, we must soothe emotions—and that people are positively influenced by validation. Just last week at the airport, I saw a traveler miss his connection. He was pissed, and he let the gate agent know it. Experience tells us that when someone is in the grip of limbic hijacking, letting them vent helps.

If you're present when that happens, or if you're the target of the vitriol:

- Try to create more space between yourself and the other person. Back away slightly. Angle your body so you're not face-to-face head on.
- Focusing on the person's face rather than looking into their eyes may help to reduce anger.
- Saying "calm down" rarely works, but lowering your voice and speaking in a calm manner does.
- Take a deep breath. We gravitate toward those whom we perceive as being under control. This deep breath and long exhale, I have found in my research, sends a subconscious message to cue the other person toward the path to beginning to calm down.
- Maintain boundaries. You are caring, but you're not a human chew toy. When venting passes the point of what's

reasonable, then it's time to bring the conversation to a logical conclusion, though it may not be perfect, or to distance yourself. As I noted in my book *Dangerous Personalities*, you have no social obligation, ever, to be victimized.

4. **Consider seating.** Communication research (including the study of primates) reveals that we are more comfortable when people sit at slight angles to us rather than directly opposite us. In the FBI I avoided sitting directly across from anyone I was interviewing and for the most part I succeeded. Sitting or standing at angles assures us of greater face time as well as greater social comfort. In business, the research is ample: you get more done sitting at angles—so if it's an important meeting, consider finding the right place and optimal seating to conduct the meeting.
5. **Mind your head.** Tilting your head as others speak increases the amount of time people will engage us and helps others to feel that you're receptive and open-minded.
6. **Mirror behaviors.** Mirroring, also known as body echoing or isopraxis, is a shortcut to the subconscious. It has been shown repeatedly that synchrony is harmony. In other words, when we're conversing with others, our bodies will echo or mirror each other when there's a high degree of concurrence in thought or feelings. This translates into psychological comfort. We see this with mother and baby, between good friends or colleagues immersed in productive conversation, or between lovers at a café staring at each other in perfect synchrony.

We encourage others to communicate more freely and openly when we mirror their behaviors. I'm not talking about cartoonishly copying every move, but following the general pattern and rhythm of their movements: when they lean back, we in short order lean back; if they order a drink, we also order a drink. Think of a conversation as being a guest in someone's psychic space: you're relaxed and attentive,

following the house rules with warmth and responsiveness, as you would if you were at the home of someone you know.

When we mirror others properly, it's so seamless and harmonious as to be unnoticeable. When conducting long debriefings in my FBI career, I found mirroring invaluable in getting others to cooperate.

You can mirror activity, too, as Director Freeh did in running in synchrony with us. It could be getting a tray of lunch in the company cafeteria and asking a table of your employees if you could join them . . . standing in the buffet line along with everyone else . . . bringing your brown bag lunch to the working meeting . . . boarding the bus to the church retreat instead of driving on your own . . . working out with the team . . . walking the factory floor and asking how things are going.

7. **Mirror language.** Mirroring words is also powerful. If you're talking with me and I use the words *problem*, *family*, *character* and you respond using words like *issue*, *wife and kids*, *personality*, we're not really in synchrony. Subconsciously, I'll perceive that the importance and weight I personally attach to the words *problem*, *family*, *character* are not being valued or properly understood. Yes, we're talking, but we're not communicating effectively—certainly not as one. To communicate effectively, we must show we understand each other by recognizing the value other people place on certain words. When they talk about *church*, or *grandkids*, or their *baby* (pet dog), those words have a special weight and significance; when we also give value to those words by using them, we are helping to establish more sympathetic channels of communication. When we tap into those precise words others use, as the famed therapist Carl Rogers found more than sixty years ago, we tap into a level of the mind that finds this synchrony appealing and influential.

I practiced verbal mirroring constantly in the FBI. One day I'd be just this side of the border of San Luis, in the state of Sonora, Mexico; the next I was on the Upper East Side of

Manhattan debriefing a Soviet defector or an East German refugee, or down in Miami where the cocaine wars brought us into contact with Jamaicans, Colombians, Cubans, or Puerto Ricans. In each case, we had to adjust, whether we were talking to informants, witnesses, victims, their families, their neighbors, the suspects, or anyone of informational interest. It wasn't just a language issue; it was a word value issue, and we used that to our advantage to build rapport.

If a New Yorker from Queens tells you so-and-so "is a stand-up guy," that has special meaning. To respond "So you trust him?" doesn't begin to capture the weight of what was meant. You are at that moment not in harmony. I remember the first time I heard a Tampa native say, "He's a Yankee." Now, there was a loaded word. It was clear she wasn't referring to the baseball team.

Mirroring doesn't mean we must use all the words other people use—some are disgusting and dehumanizing. So there are times when we won't be in harmony. Still, we must recognize the weight others have given to certain words. And in this case, Yankee was code for anyone from up north or a recent arrival, or a legacy term alluding to "carpetbaggers" who arrived from the North after the Civil War.

8. **Listen for primacy and recency.** Listen not only for what is said, but also in what order (primacy), and how often (recency) certain words and topics are mentioned. This can be invaluable in discerning what's troubling someone, pointing toward what their priorities may be or what issues are on their mind. If a topic or even a word is often repeated, pay attention. Repetition can shed light on unresolved or underlying issues, even pathologies.
9. **Take notes.** When conversations matter, especially in business, take notes. Richard Branson, one of the world's most enterprising people, doesn't just listen; he talks to everyone who works for him, wherever he finds them—and then he goes one step further in his quest for clarity: he takes notes. To me it demonstrates that he cares so much about what his

employees have to say that he will write it down so he won't forget. What this communicates is clear: *Message received, this is important to you as well as me, action to follow.* Imagine how it would improve communication and rapport if our bosses, managers, supervisors, and leaders did only that. How often have you talked to a supervisor and wondered if anything would ever come of it, or if they would even remember it, since they didn't write it down?

Another good reason to take notes: if there are issues—and any organization will have them—whoever has the best documentation wins. I learned that in the FBI and in my private consulting work over the last eighteen years. Working memory, as it's called, doesn't work perfectly. Humans get things wrong all the time. And none of us is immune to forgetting. It's hard to forget something that's staring at you in your journal or to-do list. Write it down to remind you to get it done, to inspire you, and to protect you if need be, but write it down.

I've found one more benefit to writing things down. Using available technology, I can now have real-time, face-to-face communications with clients around the world. Often the callers are stressed about a particular issue. After I hear what they have to say, I ask everyone involved to put their thoughts in writing. Not because I'm lazy and don't want to take notes. I am taking notes. But for clarity, I want everyone to think about what they're saying, what they saw or heard, and what they want the record to actually reflect.

Repeatedly, I've found that what they initially emphasized, upon reflection and with a little more critical thinking, changes—and always for the better. What they initially mentioned first now may come second. Other factors come to light. With less emotion and more thinking, the facts become more lucid.

Emotions affect our ability to observe. In our conversation, I allow my clients to air their emotions so that we—especially they—can see more plainly what the key

issues are. Those show up in the written version. In the end, too, a written record of an incident may be needed, so why not do it as soon as possible?

This is especially important in human resource situations where tempers may be at issue, or when something has happened that's critical to the business. I find that by encouraging clients to immediately write down their thoughts and observations after airing the problem helps them to both calm down and gain greater clarity.

As a person or as a leader, we cannot communicate with clarity until we understand with clarity. To do that, we must be able to differentiate between what is emotional and what is factual; between what someone thinks and what someone knows or suspects. For that, writing things down is magical.

10. **Agree and add.** Decades ago, an instructor came to one of our seminars at Quantico to talk about establishing rapport. He had an interesting perspective, as he worked in the theater and, in particular, comedy. One thing he talked about was a technique he had learned in improvisational comedy: agree and add.

Basically, it works like this. The person says something: "This commute sucks!" To which you say: "It really sucks [agree . . . and then add:]—especially when there's an accident." With that single statement, you've let someone know that you're listening, you validate, and you get it. Or they say: "He's such a know-it-all." To which you reply: "He is, isn't he—always has to have the last word." Simple repetition of what was said, with something small added that lets them know you understand and are in sync. How much better this is than when someone replies, "Yeah," "Right," "Uh-huh," or simply nods. Sure, sometimes an affirming nod works fine. But for validating others' thoughts and feelings, agree and add works best.

Incidentally, this doesn't mean you can't disagree. If you're completely opposed to something someone says and find it objectionable, feel free to express that. But there are ways to

do it with nuance. I call it the Agree, Add, Affirm Method. As before, you *agree* and *add* something—but then you *affirm* your own thoughts or convictions on the matter. It might sound like this: “Yes, commuting really sucks, especially in the winter.” Then, after a few seconds, you affirm: “But to be fair, it’s remarkable how they keep the roads open after a heavy snow.” Or you could say: “I agree with you—the commute stinks and it’s a big hassle, but it’s certainly better than last year at this time.”

Caring doesn’t mean bowing to what everyone else says. There’s a place for your own take. But for the sake of harmony, it’s wiser to agree, add, and affirm.

I know wonderful, intelligent people who just don’t get this and bring pleasant conversations to a halt by pedantically correcting a minor detail or by outright disagreeing. Conversations are so much more successful and collaborative when we allow everyone to feel they can talk and share ideas. We don’t need to always correct or edit what others say. If you continually object to what people say, they’ll eventually grow tired of interacting with you.

The Healer’s Method

This final communication technique is one I’ve shared with clinicians over the years but have rarely mentioned in my writing. It’s so important that I’ve given it a section of its own. I call it *The Healer’s Method*, but it applies to a much broader range of situations than the name might suggest.

As a student of anthropology, I have examined the practices of shamans or healers throughout the world. When you think about it, good emotional and physical health is the ultimate state of comfort and well-being, and often what the shaman or healer does is more psychological than anything else. Through dances, incantations, animal sacrifices, physical manipulation of objects, laying on of hands,

the power of suggestion, drugs, and of course the placebo effect, they provide comfort, and in some cases contribute to healing.

By studying these techniques that are seen in many cultures, and while working with clinicians to improve their communications skills, I was able to decode what the most effective healers do. In fact, those clinicians who consistently were rated highly by patients, where the patient felt that their health had improved under that clinician's care, were using the Healer's Method without realizing it.

The Healer's Method follows this sequence: Visual, Vocal, Verbal, Tactile.

1. **Visual.** Just as a mother—the first healer/helper/caregiver most of us know—enters the room and makes the baby happy just by coming into view, so clinicians who entered the room with their white lab coat on, stethoscope around neck or visibly displayed, received the highest ratings. Why? Because those are the accoutrements that we in the modern world associate with the healer—someone who makes people feel better. A doctor or a nurse is that archetypal figure. The clinician's smile, another powerful visual, makes the patient smile, something Mother Teresa of Calcutta practiced herself and advocated when she said, "We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do."
2. **Vocal.** The visual is followed by the vocal—the tone of the healer's voice: pleasing, interested, engaged—that invites conversation and creates psychological comfort. Here's an example from a physician in Tampa, Florida, who allowed me to attend his morning hospital rounds: "How are you, Mrs. Garza? How's the shoulder?" The tone is comforting, not hurried, not indifferent—signaling genuine interest in her response.
3. **Verbal.** The doctor's words add to the therapeutic effect: caring, knowledgeable about the person's concerns, calling her by name. This doctor continued: "Do you have a little bit more movement today? Let me see you raise your arm."

He asked her with a smile, modeling the movement using his own arm for her to see. “This is wonderful progress,” he said, examining her closely, validating her efforts, only then taking notes.

4. **Tactile.** Then this doctor took his patient’s hand as you would your grandmother (palm up), not vertical as you would a business associate, and he wished her continued success. Still holding her hand, he gently patted her upper arm with his other hand. “I will see you again before I leave today,” he promised, his hand firmly reinforcing his words; his smile causing her to smile in turn. Mrs. Garza, even though having discomfort, lavished praise on this doctor and when asked to rate her pain on a scale of one to ten after his visit she rated it as three where earlier she had rated it as a five.

In my FBI career, decisions were often made simpler because of rigid boundaries of comportment. One merely had to ask, is it within the law? Is it ethical? Will it stand up to judicial scrutiny or Department of Justice guidelines? But in life, we don't always have those kinds of institutional criteria. The *Ethical Action Protocol* (a guide I developed in collaboration with Toni Sciarra Poynter for decision-making when there is doubt or uncertainty as to how to proceed) is a series of four questions that I've found useful in weighing the appropriateness of actions under consideration:

1. Do my actions and behavior build trust?
2. Do my actions and behavior add value?
3. Do my actions and behavior positively influence or inspire?
4. Are my actions and behavior prosocial?

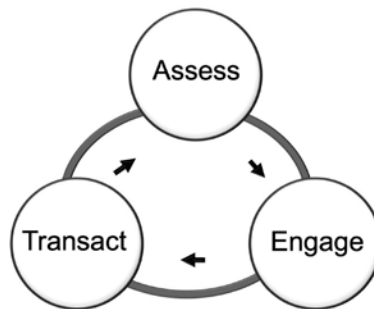
The EMSI framework is a three-phase feedback loop that allows us to engage with others based on real-time observations rather than sticking to predetermined agendas. Too often, for example, even a seasoned salesperson is so focused on their “script” that they hope to cover that they’re blind to what’s happening right in front of them: that the person they’re trying to engage is in a hurry, not in the mood, is losing interest, isn’t impressed, or has already made up their mind.

In the FBI, I found the EMSI guide effective in establishing cooperation even with people who at first would have nothing to do with me. When I retired from the FBI, I found the model worked equally well in the business sector, where the better you can assess, adapt, and engage in real time, the greater your probability of successful transaction.

Assess

Suppose you arrive at work and someone comes into your space and jumps right into: “Hi, this report came back—we have to add these

Empathic Social Interaction



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Key Questions for Assessment

Here are some things to consider and assess for before and during a meeting with others:

- › **What do I know about them?** With social media, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, you have many opportunities not only to see what someone looks like and to learn about their background, but also to observe and listen to them for the information we discuss in this book. You can pick up a lot from their podcasts, interviews, and videos, including talking style, subjects of interest, accomplishments, even personality. Information like this can help you to establish rapport more quickly if you know what to talk about and what to avoid, while observing for what may be characteristic displays of comfort or discomfort.
- › **What's the meeting protocol?** When in doubt, I call ahead to determine how much time I can anticipate we'll have for the meeting. This is something I'll check on again once I arrive. I've found that office assistants, secretaries, even colleagues are more than willing to help. Knowing ahead of time where we'll be meeting (office, conference room, cubicle, public space, virtually) is also helpful. As I write this amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to know what protocol is in place regarding mask-wearing. There are sometimes cultural protocols, too, to ascertain ahead of time.
- › **What are their spatial needs?** Even before shaking hands (more about that below), one of our first responsibilities is to assess for the spatial needs of others. The moment someone violates our space, we become uncomfortable; it may even render us unable to remember what someone said. To protect against the negative impressions spatial violations leave, it is incumbent upon us to assess for spatial needs that are cultural (in some cultures people like to stand very close; you see that in the Caribbean); or it may be personal (I prefer to have people no

closer than three feet). Then there's the situational factor: at a party I may tolerate someone standing closer, but not in a business meeting, and certainly not when I'm around strangers on the street. To maximize face time, we must be careful to not violate spatial needs.

One quick way to assess for spatial needs: When I shake hands (if the person is comfortable doing so—and that's easy enough to just ask—even flu season can be a reason why some people would rather not shake), I lean in, making sure that my torso is at least four feet distant, so each party is leaning forward and extending their arms about two feet or so. If the person smiles and retracts their hand after shaking and does not move, I then maintain that distance, as that is probably comfortable for them. If the person moves back a step, then I know they need that extra space, and I respect that. If they move closer, then I know that is their more favored distance. Spatial needs are crucial, including your own, so if *you* need to back up a little, do so.

Another spatial tip: from my own experience in creating comfort, I know that by just angling my torso away a bit, I can make others more comfortable. In other words, don't continue to stand directly in front of someone.

Keep in mind that as people converse, they may move around each other or closer to each other. Changes like these should be noted as part of assessing psychological comfort and for progress in establishing trust and rapport.

- › **What else might be going on?** Continually assess for factors that may disrupt a person's comfort level. Look for the usual culprits: limited time, dislike of meetings, hunger, fatigue, even nicotine withdrawal. At a meeting once I noticed a man moving a lot in his chair. He seemed to be restless. At first, I thought it was simple fatigue, as we had all been at it for a while. Then I noticed the nicotine-stained fingers of his right hand and realized he needed and wanted a cigarette. I called a break.

Sometimes there's discomfort from an unknown event that may have happened earlier in the day and may have nothing

to do with us, yet we can see it in others' faces. Maybe they're upset because they had a hard time finding the office. Travel, especially cross-country, can wear anyone out. Perhaps they were up all night with a sick child. Be sensitive and attentive.

Sometimes there's irritability around something that was said or done, unresolved past issues between the participants, or a real or perceived inconvenience.

Whatever the circumstance, always remember, our bodies reflect our moods in real time. Pay attention, be sensitive, don't hesitate to ask if a break is needed, if they need privacy to make a call, if the meeting needs to be cut short because a snowstorm is moving in fast and will affect travel, if food and refreshments are needed, or if there's anything you can do to assist or ameliorate the situation. Action has a weight all its own.

Sometimes all you can do is validate someone's discomfort or annoyance, but at least validation brings us closer at a subconscious level. Remember: to validate is to venerate.

- › **What can I offer to foster comfort?** Never underestimate the primacy and appeal of simple hospitality. The act of offering something to drink, a comfortable place to sit, a moment to clear the mind, a place to charge a phone—these courtesies are so easy, and they count for so much. The need to transact should not in any way inhibit your duty to create psychological comfort through prosocial acts such as attentive hospitality.

Keys for Positive Engagement

Here are some things you can do to facilitate comfort and enhance your engagement with others:

- › **Mirror their behaviors.** If they want to stand and talk while leaning against a wall, do the same. If they have coffee, have one also, or at least something to drink. While sitting, you can subtly mirror their posture: Are they leaning forward, with hands on table? Leaning back with arms crossed, head tilted? It doesn't have to be identical, just similar.
- › **Mirror their words.** If they say, "This is going to cause real problems," don't say, "We can work out the issues." Mirroring people's words ("problems," not "issues") contributes to harmony. If they're using sports terminology, resolve to work with that, even if it's not your forte. If they want to "hit it out of the park," "put some points on the board," "punt it" to another department, or make a "slam dunk"—those may be terms you have to employ also to let them know that you get it.
- › **Adjust to their speech pace.** We can never match another person's speech pattern, but if someone likes to talk fast, make an effort to keep up with them. If they are slow and deliberate, don't talk too fast. This is a complaint I hear often about "fast-talking" people.
- › **If you're using technical or professional terms or buzzwords, make sure that everyone understands what they mean.** Euphemisms or colloquialisms like "that has a lot of moving parts" or "you could hear crickets" or "that dog won't hunt" might not resonate with people from different regions or cultures. In New York you may hear the word *capiescce* [pronounced "kuh-peesh"], used to mean "do you understand?" I lived in Utah and Arizona for about ten years and I never heard it used once. Each generation has its own preferred words or trending words, too—be careful you don't

fall into the trap of thinking everyone understands. Same goes for terms of art specific to particular industries.

- › **Assess for the nonverbals of synchrony.** This is subtle, but if they are breathing and blinking at approximately the same rate as you, chances are you're in synchrony. This is good! If they're leaning back and spreading their arms out on the couch, these are positive signs, as is looking away as we talk and think—it means we're comfortable enough to freely look away from each other, as if with friends.
- › **Don't let repetitive behaviors distract you.** Many people have them. I like to bounce my leg. Some people twirl pencils or do other things. It's how they soothe themselves and pass the time. But be careful when they begin to drum their fingers suddenly—it may be a sign of impatience or boredom—so watch for other clues to try and confirm.
- › **Know when to wrap things up.** Be aware that when they're looking at the clock, their smartphone, or the exit repeatedly, or if their feet point toward the door—there may be other things on their agenda. If you see these behaviors or if you see their hands on their knees, it's probably time to wrap up the meeting. Don't hesitate to ask, "How are we doing on time?" They will appreciate it.

A final, important caveat: dedicating yourself to fostering psychological comfort does not mean that you have to become a "yes person" or a sycophant. You can create an environment where there is psychological comfort with well-established and rigorous boundaries. Psychological comfort is an objective; it does not mean obsequiousness or subservience.

Keys for Effective Transaction

Here are some of the factors I focus on during transaction:

- › **Go a step beyond body language.** Keep assessing individuals' body language, but also be aware of distractions that are pulling them out of engagement. It could be text messages being received and answered (including their reactions to those messages). It could be room temperature (Are they taking off their jacket, rolling up their sleeves? Or the opposite: Wrapping their shawl around themselves or rubbing chilly arms?), time of day (Afternoon energy slump? Sun shining into their eyes?), or environmental noise (Can you close the door, step out for a moment to quietly ask others to tone things down a notch, or suggest the meeting be continued at a quiet café down the street?).
- › **Note changes in word usage**, such as “the project” versus “our project” or other language that indicates that some reserve has crept in. If they say, “You said,” be prepared to do more reengaging because this is usually a prelude to latent emotions behind some unresolved issue, such as: “You said we could close on the house June 1. What happened?” Just those two words let you know you have more engagement work and explaining to do. Similarly, “What about . . . ?” gives you a hint that issues need to be resolved before the transaction can move forward.
- › **If you see discomfort displays or signals that they've heard enough, don't just keep talking.** You want to keep the conversation going, but paradoxically, that means switching gears when you see nonverbals that say they've made up their mind (lips pursed fully forward or pursed and then quickly pulled dramatically to one side) or they have issues. Lip pursing, neck scratching, ventilating behaviors (pulling on shirt collar) or jaw shifting are hints that something's not right. They're your cue to pause and ask what they're thinking thus far, what issues may be of concern to them. Or you may wish

to remain silent, let them fill the void. This gives them the opportunity to take the conversation in the direction they wish to pursue. When you see there are concerns, remember, those things you are observing are a means of communicating what they may be feeling without expressing it in words. Not hearing words of concern doesn't mean we ignore it. I like to address it right there and then, especially when I know time is limited. Why drag it out? Make it easy for them by saying, "Does this sound like something you would be comfortable with?" Most likely they will come back and say, politely, this is not for us or we want to go in another direction. And that's fine. Allow your gracious acceptance that this isn't working for them to save your reputation for another day.

- › **Remember you're there to convey, not convince.** Address questions quickly, without hesitation. You're prepared, so you'll be comfortable with facts and details. Now is not the time to cajole or push. The exceptional never have to do that. Others' reception of your pitch or offer or ideas will be based on two things: how they feel about what is tendered, and how they perceive you. Presumably your products and services speak for themselves.
- › **Don't fight the tyranny of indifference.** What happens if no matter what you have done they seem indifferent or distracted or perhaps emotionally they are not in a good place? It's best to walk away and return another day. As I often warn executives, "Don't waste your best lines when it's the worst of times." Wisdom is knowing what to say that matters and when to say it. That is what exceptional individuals do.
- › **No matter what happens, remain confident in who you are.** At this point, you have done all you can. Your message is strong, you are prepared, you radiate enthusiasm, congeniality, and trustworthiness. You got here through self-mastery, observation, and utilizing your best communication skills. The rest is up to them.

Stewardship doesn't stop at some magical finish line. Life has no such finish line. Stewardship is nurtured, shared, passed down from one to the next. It happens through these Five Domains that we learn, model, and bequeath to others in the great circle of human life:

- › Through *self-mastery* we harness the internal resources to execute our aims, and aim ever higher.
- › Through *observation* we come to know what is needed to ameliorate situations and relationships.
- › We establish and nourish relationships through our ability to validate and *communicate* what matters most in a timely manner.
- › All these hone our capacity to choose the prosocial *actions* that convert our positive intentions into something tangible and thus transformative.
- › The ultimate result: the attenuation of fear and the creation of *psychological comfort*—that most precious gift humans seek, and our greatest strength for influencing others.

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