

Three Quick Tricks for “Reading Minds”

Courtesy of Jeffrey Krivis, author of *Improvisational Negotiation: A Mediator’s Stories of Conflict about Love, Money, Anger—and the Strategies That Resolved Them* (Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Imprint, 2006, ISBN: 0-7879-8038-2, \$35.00).

Knowing what people are thinking and feeling can help you build rapport and, eventually, resolve conflicts. Here are a few tips from master mediator Jeffrey Krivis to get you started:

- **Notice body language cues.** People can tell you a lot about what they’re thinking and feeling without ever saying a word. When someone fidgets, fails to make eye contact, or clears her throat a lot, she may be feeling insecure. When she turns her body away from you, keeps her arms crossed, and displays facial tension, she is probably on the defensive. When she casts her eyes downward or to the left, she is most likely deceiving you.

“Read up on the basics of body language,” suggests Krivis. “Most people give away a wealth of information about themselves without realizing it. It’s very hard to fake body language. But you don’t have to make an exhaustive study. Just start paying close attention to what people do with their hands, eyes, and body in everyday conversation and you’ll quickly start to pick up on which cues go with which situations.”

- **Listen carefully to determine what NLP “type” a person may be. Then speak his or her language.** According to the principles of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), there are three types of people: *visual*, *auditory*, and *kinesthetic*. When you can determine what category a person falls into, you can deliberately build a rapport with him or her.

- *Visual* people say things like “Can we look into this further?” and “I am getting a clearer picture now.”

- Someone with an *auditory* focus might say “I hear you loud and clear,” or “Now that you’ve voiced your opinion, may I tell you what would resonate with me?”

- Finally, a *kinesthetic* person might say, “That feels right to me,” or “I’m not grasping what you’re telling me.” Interestingly, if a person seems emotionally “shut down” (like the plaintiff in tip three of the press release), he’s probably a kinesthetic person as well.

“The words people use reveal a lot about how they make sense of the world around them,” says Krivis. “Determine what NLP focus a person has and you can connect with her by using the same words and phrases that she uses.”

- **Use props to put people at ease and draw them out.** In his office conference room, Krivis has an electric guitar signed by Bob Dylan. When a person immediately notices it and begins enthusiastically talking about it, Krivis knows he’s an “auditory.” “Visuals” are drawn to his crystal ball or his Sandy Koufax baseball card. Finally, “kinesthetics” seem to be snared by his pictures of President John F. Kennedy (who tends to evoke strong emotion in people) and a touching photo of a black person and a white person holding hands at the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“These props serve several purposes,” says Krivis. “Yes, they help me identify a person’s NLP focus so that I can bond with him more effectively and hopefully encourage him to shift his position. But also, props simply serve as icebreakers. Whether you’re a mediator or not, it’s a good idea to put people at ease or make them laugh. It’s just a matter of social grace.”

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**For more information, please contact Dottie DeHart, Rocks-DeHart
Public Relations, at (828) 459-9637 or DSDeHart@aol.com,
or visit www.firstmediation.com.**