

Welcome to Say What?! Episode 3. This week: A few words about non-verbal communication.

Last time, I mentioned how I've been reading more now that my work schedule is disrupted.

And I read two articles recently that stuck with me. Both are about non-verbal communication.

When we interact with others, we're heavily influenced by cues like facial expressions, hand gestures, body posture, even leg and foot movements.

We also sense the space between each other, we hear ambient sounds, even smells can influence the way we communicate, the way we listen, and the way we understand others.

But these days, many of those cues are harder to recognize, or even just non-existent.

In the onscreen world of Zoom conferences, we have far fewer of these cues to work with.

We typically can't see the person's hand gestures, and body movements. And even voice inflection can be muddled.

And, the on-screen world has different distractions from those in the live world. For example, we can often see ourselves as one frames of the meeting, which is odd, and rarely, if ever, happens in real life.

People's backgrounds can be a distraction too. Their dog walks by. The ceiling fan is running, or the person is looking at their phone, or a second monitor.

And people's faces are often somewhat distorted and closer to the screen than they would be to us in the real world. So it's harder to pay attention to the person we're speaking with.

But it's not just the remote conferencing that's affecting communication.

It's when we're out in public too. With so many people wearing protective face coverings, much of the subtlety of social interaction is lost.

So I've been thinking: how do we compensate for our hidden expressions?

Although our mouths and noses are often covered, we can still convey meaning with our eyes, our eyebrows, our hands, and the way we hold our bodies.

I've kept an article I read a few years ago in Fast Company magazine.

It's called The Science of In-Person Communication. The author talks about how a lot of cues happen when we interact face-to-face, that don't happen virtually.

And those subtle cues can affect our ability to build trust, our ability to help others pay attention, and our listener's ability to understand our meaning.

Human Beings did not communicate with people who weren't physically close to them until maybe the last hundred years or so.

And our brains haven't evolved as rapidly as technology has. So in many ways, we have to work harder to be engaged when we're interacting remotely, or when non-verbal cues are missing.

The Fast Company article offers ways to understanding the science of what happens when people interact. It's fascinating. I'll post a link to the article on the Podcast page on my website.

I'll also include a link to a great article I read last week on the Psychology Today blog.

It's called 4 Ways to Communicate When You Can't See Someone's Face. It was written by a professor of psychological and brain sciences at the UMass Amherst.

The author describes experiences we've all had over the past few weeks, when emotions or messages are lost or distorted because people have their faces covered in some form of protection, and we're all practicing social distancing.

The four ideas she offers are

that we pay attention to how our emotions affect our message, and how those emotions are often conveyed through our eyes.

How we can use our eyebrows to communicate feelings or subtleties of our message.

She also recommends using our hands and body posture more noticeably to add emphasis.

And her final suggestion – and my favorite – is that we practice patience – with ourselves, and with others, as we all try to navigate this new world of social interaction.

So this week, while you're on your Zoom conference with coworkers, and as you venture out to the grocery store, why not practice a few simple non-verbal communication techniques.

And see if you notice a difference in how people respond to you and how they interact with you.

Who knows? It might just bring a smile to your face!

That's Say What?! for this week. Thanks for listening.

The music on today's episode is from guitarist Robbie Sturtevant. His band, The Quins, are one of the hottest new groups coming out of Boston. Check them out at <https://www.thequinsband.com/> and on Facebook and Instagram @thequins.

## Links

### The Science Of When You Need In-Person Communication

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3051518/the-science-of-when-you-need-in-person-communication>

### 4 Ways to Communicate When You Can't See Someone's Face

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/202004/4-ways-communicate-when-you-cant-see-someones-face>