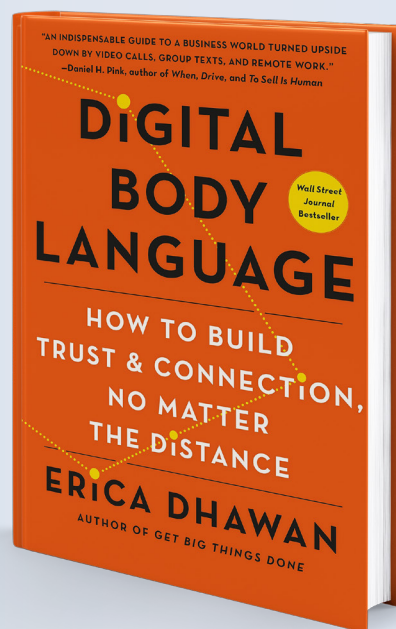


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Digital Body Language

By Erica Dhawan

Erica Dhawan is a globally recognized leadership expert and keynote speaker helping organizations and leaders innovate faster and further, together. Erica has spoken, worldwide, to organizations and enterprises that range from the World Economic Forum to U.S. and global Fortune 500 companies, associations, sports teams and government institutions. Named as one of the top management experts around the world by GlobalGurus, she is the founder and CEO of Cotential - a company that has helped leaders and teams leverage 21st century collaboration skills globally. Her writings have appeared in dozens of publications, including Fast Company and Harvard Business Review.

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Fostering Connection, No Matter the Distance

After co-authoring her first book, *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence*, Erica Dhawan went on a mission to help CEOs and organizations solve the challenges of managing across global, multigenerational, matrixed, and virtual teams. On her travels, the same questions kept coming up, “How do I keep teams connected to each other and to people on other teams? How do I help people of different ages and working styles who rarely meet in person communicate effectively? Why does it seem infinitely harder to foster trust, engagement, and the confidence to take risks? And finally, why do my own communications so often seem to miss the mark, producing unintended and anxiety-filled consequences?”

Over time Erica discovered she could solve their communication problems by teaching them a skill she calls digital body language. Over the years, she has taught this vital skill to people worldwide, such as coaches, doctors, lawyers, and board members, and now wants to share it with whoever wants to learn, grow and succeed, through her latest book of the same name. By the end of *Digital Body Language*, Erica’s mission is to “help you get closer to anyone—intellectually, emotionally, personally, professionally— and make you stand out as a trusted, straightforward leader, no matter the distance.”

Digital Elements of Style

To succeed in the business world, one should always look for ways to move forward rather than standing still. If you don’t move with the times, you will end up lost in the forest while others have built a cabin and moved onto bricks. Today roughly 70 percent of all communications among teams are virtual. If you don’t know how to efficiently transfer your physical body language and communication styles onto the screen, your career could be in for a rough ride.

To truly grasp digital body language and begin to implement it, you must first learn what it is and the many forms it can take.

“It’s a little like a French-English dictionary, but in this case, my mission is to translate in-person body language to such things as punctuation, video call first impressions, abbreviations, signa-



tures, and the time it takes to press Send.”

Take a look at an example from the book, showing what those translations may look like:

Traditional Body Language involves: a head tilted to one side, signaling that another person is listening attentively.

Digital Body Language involves: “liking” a text. Praising another person’s input in an email. Making a detailed comment verbally or in the chatbox during a video call when someone expresses an idea, instead of saying, “I agree.”

The wrong word, the lack of them, or even the wrong emoji can make a person misunderstood online and send the person on the other side of the screen, reeling into anxiety and paranoia and killing their productivity at work.

Erica gives a great example,

“They had been going out for three years when the fight, conducted exclusively via text message, occurred. The fight lasted for hours, back and forth, until at one point, frustrated and weary, Laura tapped out, ‘So r we thru? I guess so,’ Dave replied.

Laura was devastated. She called in sick to work the next day and spent the next 24 hours mourning the loss of her relationship by meeting friends, looking through old photos, and crying. The next night, Dave appeared on her doorstep. Laura, puffy-eyed, answered the door. “Did you forget about the dinner we planned a few days ago?” he said. “You said we were through,” Laura said. “I meant we were through arguing,” Dave said, “not through as in you and me.” Laura went through awful emotions, but it also affected her job and the company she worked for.

Miscommunication can cause confusion, delays, lack of productivity, and more in a business. Taking an extra five minutes to go over the latest email leaving your inbox can prevent hours of an employee wondering what you wanted them to do if you’re upset at them, or worse, if they are about to get fired. Take the time to think about what you’re saying, whom you’re saying it to and if you have given all the information that they will require to do a good and efficient job.

Writing the wrong thing, using too many exclamation marks, or a bad email signature can cause problems and confusion in the workplace. However, one big problem Erica discovered in the workplace was nothing to do with words at all; it was the dreaded Signs of Silence.

With technology today allowing us to communicate with people so rapidly, it can leave us anxious and worried when we don’t get an instantaneous response after sending an email, DM, or Slack message. Why didn’t they get back to me? Do they not like me anymore? Was that project I sent that bad? I’ll show them!

Take a look at this simple example of how delayed response time can play with someone’s mind:

“Imagine you just called a co-worker on a different team with

the words ‘Dinner soon?’ Two days later, no response. But your co-worker has found the time to post a new picture of his corgi on Facebook and Instagram. Instead of following up with a new email, you “like” his social media corgi photo, hoping your little red heart will guilt him into responding to your first email. A week goes by before he responds with ‘Sorry for the delay!!!!’ When you finally meet, it turns out that he really was just overwhelmed with stressors (training a corgi puppy takes work) and didn’t have the emotional bandwidth for a dinner meeting.”

A relatively new term, “Ghosting,” describes where a person avoids a message, sometimes simply needing a break from that specific person. For example, have you ever avoided opening Whatsapp revealing that you have read a message; instead, you pull down your notification list to look at the sneak preview? In a workplace, avoiding colleagues and leaving them in limbo can harm the business. A company needs to put rules in place. Setting rules on response times and what mediums work best can go a long way to increase productivity and a calmer environment.

Check out some of the ways Erica Dhawan suggests to avoid Digital Ghosting:

If you are waiting for a response:

Don’t jump to conclusions. Unless it’s critical that you get a reply ASAP, remember that people may have a lot on their plates.

If you follow up twice with no response, switch to a different medium.

If you need to get back to someone:

If you can answer in 60 seconds or less, respond immediately.

If it’s urgent, respond immediately or let the sender know you are working on it. Make an appointment with yourself on your calendar to answer.

For matters lacking urgency, don’t stress. Block out time to follow up later at your convenience.

The Four Laws of Digital Body Language

Erica Dhawan dives deep into the Four Laws of Digital Body Language. She teaches us how we can use digital body language to show appreciation (Value Visibly), find alignment (Communicate Carefully) to redefine teamwork for a digital era (Collaborate Confidently). By putting these pillars together to form teams characterized by psychological safety (Trust Totally).”

One very useful law is Value Visibly:

Valuing Visibly teaches us that you cannot always assume everything is alright, especially when you are not there in person to judge their physical cues. You need now more than ever to be proactive about explicitly showing you understand what the person wants and value their participation.



There are many ways that gender, generation, and cultural background can affect how we perceive digital body language cues.”

In one example, Erica Dhawan talks about when she was living in New York City while her colleague she calls “Jim” was in Dallas. Erica had just started her own consulting business, and Jim was beginning his post-college career. She chose well, and he was a fantastic, eager employee who didn’t need much oversight. Erica got on with her business at full speed, throwing tasks over to the colleague; everything was going so well! At least that’s what she thought. After six weeks, she had a check-in with Jim over the phone:

Me: So, how do you think it’s going? Because I think it’s going really well!

Jim: No, it’s not.

Me: No, it’s not? Wait, what?

Jim: No, it’s not going well and I’m thinking of quitting. Today.

Me: Today? Wait, sorry, what?

Jim: Look, I have my master’s degree, and I don’t want to do only admin work. I thought I would be handed a lot more marketing. Like we discussed in our original interview? And we barely talk about what you’re working on and the larger picture of the business.

“His Sounds good emails didn’t signal, “I will take this on happily.” They were code for “I will do this begrudgingly, but I really want to talk about my learning goals too.” My “Thx” emails, intended to communicate “I really appreciate your hard work,” were interpreted by Jim as dismissive. I thought I was being explicit, but in the end, Jim felt both underappreciated and disrespected.”

Erica also was too casual with her business relationship with Jim, showing up late to their weekly calls and angering him with her “sry running late” emails. She would answer other phone calls during their meetings without explaining why affecting their ability to pick up where they left off once she’d ended that call. Lastly, she would send sloppy emails, only answering some of Jim’s questions.

Although awkward, Erica was glad for that experience. It reminded her how important it was to Value Visibly, to show full respect to people in our personal and professional lives. After that conversation, Erica ended her meetings on time with Jim, saving them both wasted time. They both scheduled regular video check-ins to go overwork and make sure Jim felt supported and valued.

Digital Body Language Across Difference

There are many ways that gender, generation, and cultural background can affect how we perceive digital body language cues.

In a world where emojis are fast becoming the norm in an email, IM, or message on slack, people often fail to comprehend that an emoji to you might mean something very different to a person on the other side of the planet. In China, the waving hand signals “goodbye to a relationship” and not “hello.” In Japan, the “happy” emoji confuses people, who associate frequent smiling with unintelligent people. In Middle Eastern countries, the emoji of conjoined palms is a religious symbol, compared to Japan, where it simply means “Thank You.” Make sure before using emojis that you take a moment to understand how the recipient might interpret them. Failure to do so could cause confusion and even loss of business.

Experts divide the world into “high-context” and “low-context” cultures. In high-context cultures, they communicate implicitly and rely heavily on nonverbal cues. (Countries in the Mediterranean, Central Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia fall into this category.) By contrast, explicit verbal communication is a mark of low-context cultures, including most English-speaking Western cultures, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance by Erica Dhawan is insightful and informative and a pleasant read. From the beginning, Erica allows us a look into her life and how she mastered the skill of Digital Body Language. Like many of us, she has fallen over several hurdles in her life, which she is more than happy to talk about. This humility plays a big part in bringing this book to life and helping the reader feel at ease knowing they are with someone who has had the same experiences.

The book is littered with brilliant examples explaining what something is, what went wrong, and how you can fix it, should it ever come your way. But the author doesn’t stop there. Throughout the book, you are tasked with assessing how you or your company are performing at the moment, meaning, hopefully, before you have finished this book, you are already on your way to improving your digital body language skills. This book is a tool that everyone should have in their box.