**Why You Talk With Your Hands**

**February 28th, 2009** by Carol Kinsey Goman, PhD

A new study from the University of Chicago found that the more gestures babies used at 14 months (shaking a head “no,” raising arms to be picked up, pointing at an object of interest, etc.), the more words they had in their vocabulary at 3ˆ years old. Which is no surprise to those of us who study body language. Here’ are a few facts I found while researching my book, “The Nonverbal Advantage: Secrets and Science of Body Language at Work.”

Gesture and speech are so tightly connected that we can’t do one without the other. Brain imaging has shown that a region called Broca’s area, which is important for speech production, is active not only when we’re talking, but when we wave our hands. And as we grow into adulthood, gesturing becomes more complex, more nuanced, and more interesting.

Did you know . . .

* A blind person talking to another blind person will use gestures.
* All of us use gestures when talking on the telephone.
* When people are passionate about what they’re saying, their gestures become more animated.
* Studies have found that when you communicate through active gesturing, you tend to be evaluated as warm, agreeable, and energetic, while remaining still makes you be seen as logical, cold, and analytic.
* On the other hand, over-gesturing with flailing arms (especially when hands are raised above the shoulders) can make you appear out of control, less believable and less powerful.
* Some gestures have an agree-upon meaning to a group and are consciously used instead of words. (The “thumbs up” gesture in North America is one example). These gestures very by culture – and what is acceptable in one culture can be rude or insulting in another.
* Many deception cues are subconscious gestures – like the hand to mouth or nose gestures which are typically use when lying. (And, by the way, those same gestures are often displayed when listening to someone you don’t believe.)
* Pacifying gestures are used to help us deal with stress: Any self touching can be calming. You may rub your legs, pull at your collar, play with your hair, rub your neck, or even cross your arms in a kind of “self-hug.”
* Open palm gestures indicate candor, while hidden hands (or hands in pockets) signals that the person has something to hide or doesn’t want to participate in a conversation.
* Low confidence is often shown by wringing hands and interlacing fingers.
* High confidence can be displayed by a steepling gesture (palms separated and fingers touching). You’ll see this used most often by politicians, executives and professors.

So, remember, it’s okay to talk with your hands – as long as you know what they’re saying!