



## Mastering Technical Sales

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## Gestures

### The Five Step Process

Think back to a conversation you may have had with a friend, colleague or family member in the last ten days. Did you ever think about your hands and what to do with them? Exactly - gesturing is normal in regular everyday conversations, so why do so many people have difficulties in formal presentation situations? A normally fluent person becomes stiff and wooden - freezing in front of an audience because of self-awareness.

Gestures are an important part of language, predating the spoken word by thousands of years. They are critical to a presentation, and although in a few cases they directly convey meaning, they mostly serve to amplify your presence and your message. Think of them as a non-verbal microphone for your spoken words and content.

### The Five Step Process

How do you turn up the volume of your gestures? Here is the outline of the five-step process.

1. **Establish a Baseline.** Have a colleague video (or at least closely observe) your next 2-3 presentations. Examine the results to determine your baseline use of gestures.

Some questions to ask are:

"Am I actually using my hands, and arms, at all?"

"Are there any repetitive or distracting gestures?"

"Am I fidgeting?" (i.e. playing with a ring, hair or a laser pen)

"Do I seem loose, relaxed and confident?"

2. **Adjust.** Based upon your self-observations and baseline, take some action. For example, if you are not moving your hands at all, work with a friend or mentor to present a few vignettes on "*the art of karate*", "*making a vase in pottery class*", "*spiral*



*staircases*" - you get the idea. If you have repetitive or annoying gestures, note when they occur and apply avoidance techniques - also known as "*don't do that or someone will yell at you.*" For fidgets, where possible, remove the source. If I have a laser pointer in my possession, my hands wave around randomly and it looks like a rock music show on the ceiling.

3. **Refine.** Throw in some situational gestures. As an example, when enumerating points, or answering a multi-part question, use the technique of counting off with your fingers (firstly, secondly and finally). Also start to apply a mixture of symmetric actions (President Clinton uses both hands together) and asymmetric actions (single hand only for stop!). Also look to expand hand motions outside of your body frame to make a major point, as in "*the fish was this big*".



4. **Control.** It is hard to practice gestures as they need to become a natural part of your pitch, and not something forced in. You can rehearse in front of a mirror, but do not overdo it; otherwise your performance will seem wooden and over-rehearsed. Also only make one or two changes at a time; otherwise you will spend so much time focusing on all the changes you need to make that none of them will work.
5. **Control.** Repeat and go to Step 1. Do not expect or demand perfection of yourself, just aim for steady improvement.

"It's a rather rude gesture – but at least it is clear what you mean"

*Katherine Hepburn, US Actress 1907-2003)*

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at [www.masteringtechnicalsales.com](http://www.masteringtechnicalsales.com).

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