

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY HANDS?

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Your hands are very useful in supporting your message. When not fulfilling this purpose, they should be allowed to hang down naturally at your sides. Furthermore, to avoid being distracted by your hands, concentrate harder on your message and speak more energetically.

Do you get the impression that your hands are in the way? An unpleasant sensation, isn't it?

I clearly remember wondering what to do with my hands. During my first speeches, I would grab the lectern or the side of the table. If there was nothing to hold on to, I would clasp my hands in front of me. I knew I didn't look natural but I couldn't resist. I would stand there, as stiff as a wooden statue.

To know what to do with your hands, try the following experiment. Stand up. Close your eyes and imagine yourself very calm, and breathing deeply.

Now where are your hands? Most people say their hands are relaxed, on either side of their body. This is the position they should be in when they're not being used to punctuate your message.

Why is it then so hard to leave your hands at your sides? Because you're nervous, that's why!

When you're stressed, your whole body is tense. One way this tension shows up is in your arms. Typically, you'll bend your elbows slightly, and sometimes even make a fist. Since this stiffness is unusual, it attracts your attention and makes you wonder what to do with your hands. To solve the problem, you grab onto something.

I have good news. The feeling of not knowing what to do with your hands will disappear spontaneously as you gain confidence in your public speaking skills. However, you should avoid letting the stiff postures of today become a bad habit to get rid of tomorrow.

Until you feel comfortable in front of a group, make a conscious effort to think of something else than your hands when speaking in public. How? Be more demonstrative! Put more energy in your speech. Speak louder. In other words, stop being a spectator of your own speech and become its leading actor.

During your next speech, challenge yourself to keep your hands at your sides when they're not being used to support your message, and forget them! Instead, concentrate harder on what you're saying and be more energetic. Soon the position of your hands won't matter and your gestures will become more natural.

Happy speech!

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