College of Business Book Review by Janet Ford

Title: "Louder Than Words"

Author: Joe Navarro

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers

Length: 223 pages

Price: $24.99 (hardback)

Reading time: 4 hours

Reading rating: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

“Louder Than Words” by Joe Navarro explores multiple facets of nonverbal communication, which seems to be a hot topic these days. For example, the FOX television show “Lie to Me” features Cal Lightman as a brilliant observer of nonverbal behavior. He consults with various governmental agencies to help them solve their most difficult cases by ferreting out deception through noting the position of a hand, the change in voice pitch, the pursing of lips, or any number of other minute nonverbal cues that we subconsciously project when we tell lies.

In real life where the rest of us reside, Joe Navarro is a genuine expert on nonverbal communication, having served as an FBI Special Agent for 25 years. During his years with the FBI, Navarro developed an extensive knowledge of nonverbal communication and he is eager to share that knowledge with the business community. Having retired from the FBI, Navarro is frequently in demand to consult with, speak to, and train professional groups. He has also written extensively on the subject of nonverbal communication and how it can and should be harnessed by individuals and businesses to enhance their effectiveness and success. His most recent book, “Louder Than Words,” is an interesting read that is full of practical information, illustrations, and advice for someone who wishes to become a more effective communicator.

The fundamental premise behind Navarro’s work is that our nonverbal behavior indicates one of two states: comfort or discomfort. When we are enjoying a conversation, feel positive about an interaction, or are interested in a topic, we may tilt our heads, move closer to the other person, or give a relaxed smile. If we are uncomfortable with the conversation, or feel uncertainty, fear, defensiveness, or anger, we may engage in “blocking” motions such as crossing our arms or legs, tighten our jaw muscles, or involuntarily squint our eyes slightly and quickly. Navarro suggests that for successful and effective communication, we should be alert to signs of discomfort in those with whom we are dealing and strive to elicit signs of comfort instead. He provides examples of this strategy being used effectively in business transactions where he was a consultant. Throughout his book, he emphasizes the importance of putting our nonverbal intelligence to ethical uses that will be beneficial to all parties.

Although the bulk of the book is devoted to nonverbal communications expressed by our bodies, Navarro devotes several sections of the book to other important forms of nonverbal communication. For example, Navarro covers modes of dress, the physical appearance of one’s workspace, the attentiveness and courtesy of staff, and the importance of first impressions regarding all of the above. He addresses the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of workplace websites. Each section of his book contains material that can readily be applied to many business settings.

SPOILER ALERT: Navarro will not empower anyone to become an infallible lie detector like the fictional Cal Lightman. Rather than focusing on deception, Navarro stresses the comfort/discomfort model of nonverbal communication. Well-written and engaging, “Louder Than Words” is a useful resource for any businessperson’s library.

Janet Ford is a professor of business law in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. For previously reviewed books, visit us at our website at www.wcu.edu/cob/.