

Written In Your Face

By Neena Baid

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Whilst on a train back from London on Monday I sat next to a very charming older couple who were discussing what their newly acquired phones (passed down from their grandchildren) could do. The lady was telling the gentleman that she very rarely used words when messaging someone called Ellie because of the emotions. He corrected her by saying 'emoticons'. She carried on talking regardless saying how wonderful it was that she could send images of smiley or comical faces to the kids.

I sat back in my seat and smiled. I had just finished running a session I designed called 'Written In Your Face' for a retail company. The workshop is about human facial expressions matched to behaviours which we then translate into emotions or reactions. The expressions can range from a multitude of interactions from day to day behaviours that we recognise instinctively to the more elaborate ones that are displayed from dissatisfaction, anger, irritation and many more.

I developed the idea for the workshop after the research announcement by Dr Aleix Martinez and her team at the Ohio State University last year in March (2014). They concluded from numerous studies with volunteers that when presented with certain scenarios or situations we are likely to respond with a range of 21 different facial expressions. Chronicled research into facial expressions go back to 1862 by Guillaume Duchenne who led the way for neural pathways, he expertly used electrical stimulation to record which muscles in the face were responsible for the different facial expressions. Charles Darwin also used research to document human expressions in the comparison to animals, which can be surprisingly similar. He particularly refers to how both facial expressions and body language are instinctively inherited through a natural process of evolution. With all of this in mind it means we can interpret what is being said without words.



'Written In Your Face', was originally interwoven into a standard set of portfolio courses I run relating to change and performance management, it has now been separated because of the interest in the workshop and because of the huge benefits it brings to front facing staff. It was easy to implement the changes to the existing courses by applying character analysis exercises, these list how the person is behaving and then request the learners to draw or describe what they understand from the analysis by drawing the facial expressions. It's an extremely creative approach and



gets the room buzzing, give marker pens to a team of managers with permission to draw and you bring out their inner child resulting in some rather amusing but very accurate depictions of the characters. The results will also give you a lot of data to work with throughout the course/workshop and references to build additional scenarios to practice. Another good thing is that people tend to remember the doing rather than the listening and writing.

Why don't you give it a try, implement some of these small changes to your courses and see the difference it makes. If you do I would love to hear from you, alternatively if you need any help you are very welcome to drop me a line or perhaps even an emoji. Here are the top 10 currently being used around the world today – you might just recognise them.



Very best, Neena Baid www.neenabaid.com