

# LAW WEEK

## COLORADO

## What In-House Lawyers Don't Say (But Say Anyway)

*ACC presents 'Body Talk' workshop on nonverbal communication techniques*

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Like any other business leaders or executives, in-house lawyers have to shake a lot of people's hands. But it's a subtle art. How much pressure should they apply in the ideal handshake, they might wonder.

Always match the other person's grip in a handshake — whether it's tight or loose — said Anna Conrad, who leads executive development company Impact Leadership Solutions. Leaders are often best served by taking their cues from others, and that includes such basic rituals as the handshake.

"Leadership in communication is never about you," Conrad said. "It's always about the other person."

She would espouse this theme throughout the interactive workshop she led on body language for in-house lawyers, which the Colorado chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel presented Wednesday. Geared toward helping in-house counsel use nonverbals to communicate confidence and credibility, "Body Talk: Why What You Don't Say Matters" was the third presentation in ACC Colorado's Professional Development Series. Armstrong Teasdale's Denver Tech Center office hosted the workshop, which gathered in-house professionals from companies including as RE/MAX, Nationwide Insurance and Intrawest.

**"LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNICATION IS NEVER ABOUT YOU. IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON."**

Anna Conrad, leadership consultant and former practicing attorney

Body language is everything that encompasses a person's presence, from facial expression, stance or gestures to the amount of space he or she takes up, according to Conrad. Only 7 percent of daily communication is verbal, and the rest is nonverbal, according to an oft-cited conclusion by UCLA psychology professor Albert Mehrabian in 1967. There's a lot that corporate counsel communicate through physical cues,

whether they are aware of it or not.

Because of the roles they serve, in-house lawyers are leaders even when they don't have anyone in the company reporting to them, said Conrad, who was previously a practicing attorney whose career included public defense.

In-house lawyers often contend with the "Department of No" reputation within their company that has people in other departments assuming they are unapproachable. And because of the importance of what they communicate to others, from the board to other department employees, corporate counsel should especially be paying attention to their own nonverbal cues.

"You have to be careful of the things you say and the things you don't say, and the way you say it," Conrad said.

The two-hour interactive workshop included detailed tips on some of the following body language elements.

### THE HANDSHAKE

When it comes to having a memorable and comfortable handshake, it's all about the details. In terms of length, the consensus is that two "pumps" is the "magic number," Conrad said. And for those who naturally tend to have slightly wet or sweaty hands, it's acceptable for people to do a subtle hand wipe on their pants to avoid giving a clammy handshake. Maintaining eye contact

throughout the entire handshake is also key to portraying confidence to the other person.

### EYE CONTACT

Failing to keep sufficient eye contact with a colleague or client can communicate disinterest and insecurity, but too much can exude aggression and intimidation, the workshop participants agreed. In American business culture, it's ideal to maintain eye



**THE ASSOCIATION OF CORPORATE COUNSEL'S COLORADO CHAPTER PRESENTED AN INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP FOCUSED ON HOW IN-HOUSE LAWYERS CAN MAINTAIN STRONG BODY LANGUAGE HABITS.**

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contact with others for 75-85 percent of the interaction, Conrad said, but that isn't always easy for more introverted legal professionals.

Those less comfortable with looking into another person's eyes can maintain a less focused gaze at the lower-center of the other person's forehead, which can also come in handy when confronting people who might otherwise seem intimidating, Conrad said.

To help them determine whether they were using enough eye contact, Conrad had participants write down five people who were most important to their professional success, and then try to list the eye colors of each. The goal was to be able to name the eye colors for at least four.

### STANCE AND GENDER TRAITS

Conrad told participants that in order to maintain a more open, confident posture, some points to focus on include keeping the feet pointed forward and to practice keeping hands out of pockets, which can convey comfort but not necessarily confidence.

There are gender-specific tics that in-house lawyers should watch out for if they want to convey more confidence in their posture. Men often close their bodies by clapping their hands in front of their abdomens in what is often called the "fig leaf" stance, and women commonly do the

"half-hug" where they cross one arm in front of themselves to hold the other. Both are less confident stances that leaders sometimes might not be aware they are taking, Conrad said.

Leaders should also note the communication preferences that the other person seems to have and accommodate them, and those preferences can be typical of a person's gender. Women tend to stand close and toe-to-toe with the people they talk to, while men often stand further away and at an angle. Conrad said that it's good to be mindful of those tendencies and match the distance and stance that the other person seems to be maintaining in order to make him or her more comfortable. And making the other person more comfortable can go a long way toward making the legal professional seem more approachable and credible within the client organization.

"Communication in leadership is always about the other person, whether it's at work or at home... wherever you are," Conrad said.

The fourth and last workshop in the ACC Colorado's Professional Development Series is scheduled for Nov. 8 and will be focused on the topic of leading and managing change. •

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