

# emotional language

Emotional Language is a multi-dimensional method of communication for mental and physical well-being and personal development. It explains how our biological sensory processes influence what we experience and what we express. The application of Emotional Language is essential for effective communication.

The principles of Emotional Language are introduced through the fusion of neuroscience and interpersonal understanding. This user-friendly handbook for practitioners uses personal narrative, field examples, and reflective exercises to engage the reader actively in learning how to employ Emotional Language professionally and personally.

[emotionallanguage.org](http://emotionallanguage.org)



Compelling narrative • Thought-provoking philosophy • Practical science

*“Emotional Language is an interactive handbook that returns our attention to what comes before we speak. Balancing the power inequities between those who speak articulately and those who communicate in other ways is integrated in this comprehensive guide that honors science, physical body, environment, application, and mindfulness of Emotional Language.”*

*—Martica Bacallao, Ph.D., MSW, CP  
Department of Social Work  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

*“Mr. Huq draws from a rich blend of personal experience, neuroscience, and a meditative spiritual awareness to provide insight into ways of communicating with individuals with limited verbal abilities.”*

*—Carissa Cascio, Ph.D.  
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine*

*“This handbook offers a new and innovative approach to strengthen understanding and use of Emotional Language. It is sound, theoretically, and it also provides readers the opportunity to reflect on their communication and then to develop practical skills that will best serve their clients.”*

*—Steve May, Ph.D.  
Department of Communication  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*



Emotional Language: The Art and Science of Communication for Human Development

HUQ

# emotional language

The Art and Science of  
Communication for Human Development



ZAKI HUQ



## National and International Acclaim for *Emotional Language* from Readers Like You

“In this succinct and poignant treatise, Zaki Huq sheds valuable light on ways to enhance our communication, improve our relationships and be more effective in our personal and professional endeavors. By focusing on our senses, and through the employment of worthy self-reflective exercises, Huq guides the reader towards a path of fostering greater connections with humanity and the world around us.”

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High school teacher  
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“*Emotional Language* is a must read for all. Zaki Huq goes straight to the source of the human experience and extracts the knowledge that is so needed in our current paradigm. This handbook offers a template that helps us connect the dots between what we “think” we are and how we are actually expressing ourselves in our daily lives. This book will bridge these gaps, showing us how to thrive in our human relationships.”

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Child Therapist  
Geneva, Switzerland

“I met Mr. Huq over twenty years ago as he began working with high-risk and challenged youth. As a juvenile justice professional, I was intrigued by his non-threatening approach to communication and creating change in others. Through his extensive research and vast experience, Mr. Huq has contributed an indispensable resource in this handbook that we can all add to our “toolkit”. When implementing a training program for social work or justice personnel, this is a must-read for your staff.”

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“*Emotional Language* is a valuable resource that can be applied equally to differences of nationality, language, skill level, or economic level. A non-judgmental awareness of difference and the ability to adapt to it is what determines success or failure in communication. It is essential for persons in positions of authority over vulnerable populations to understand a client’s perspective if there is any hope of changing behaviors.”

—Myrl Weaver  
*Corrections Officer*  
*Washington State Department of Corrections*

“This handbook fills the void in formal education and training for social work professionals in nonverbal communication. It significantly enriches the field by expanding the tools available for direct practitioners. Mr. Huq’s work is a critical guide for learning to live and work effectively in our society.”

—*Helen Dombalis, MSW, MPH*  
*Social worker*  
*Washington, DC*

“Through diligent adherence to practicing his clear and undeniable ideas about who our children are and how they make it from day to day, Zaki was able to bring the concepts of friendship, shared experiences and accomplishment into Dylan’s life. His insightful methods work. Now living independently, something we believed impossible, Dylan took his first steps under the guidance of Zaki.”

—*Kevin and Dotty Hoyle*  
*Parents of a young adult with autism*  
*North Carolina*

“Beautifully written in clear and elegantly simple terms, *Emotional Language* explains how we can connect and communicate with others despite our differences. This handbook is particularly helpful for people volunteering in communities that are different from their own.”

—*Mary Morrison, M.S., Adult Education*  
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*The Kernodle Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement*  
*Elon University, North Carolina*

“From my personal encounters with intercultural communication within my parish as well as international NGOs, I deeply share Huq’s conviction that we must go beyond spoken words in order to better understand one another. This comprehensive framework for using Emotional Language opens the door to a new path for us all.”

—*Steffen Rottler*  
*Pastor*  
*Bern, Switzerland*

“In this informative handbook Mr. Huq gives clear insight into true holistic communication. He asks us to be completely attentive to our moments with each other. By being alert and present to interactive cues, we open the door to vibrant discovery with each other. With careful watchfulness of personal perceptions we can actually bridge the gap that may separate us. Mr. Huq beckons us to a sensitivity that dispels fear and invites compassion and understanding. Teachers, counselors, indeed all of us, would be served to heed his message and practice the clear guidance from this handbook.”

—*Jack Staudacher*  
*Educator and Holistic Health Therapist*  
*Arizona*

“Whatever your level of communication skill, *Emotional Language* offers a common sense approach backed by decades of active observation and practical application. Mr. Huq’s insights from his extensive experience working with individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds have been distilled brilliantly into this readable, original, and seminal book.”

—*J Wong*  
*Managing Director, JMW Resources*  
*Paris, France*

“I wholeheartedly endorse this work and appreciate how it leads the reader to introspection and engages us in a unique conversation. Huq plants thought-provoking ideas that push the current paradigm of effective communication.”

—*Joseph Carr, M.Ed, QMHP*  
*Secondary Education Teacher*  
*Oregon*

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The Art and Science of  
Communication for Human Development

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## PREFACE

Language facilitates human development; through language, people communicate experiences and connect with others. When we think of language, we think of words, but there is something more basic and innate embedded in all languages that is not quite apparent at first.

You could say that for the first thirty years of my life I listened more than I spoke. At first, I had no choice. When I was a child, my parents spoke to each other in a language that was different from the one they spoke with me. Now I am almost fifty, and most of my working life has involved understanding and representing individuals who, for many reasons, did not or could not explain their fears or needs through words. My ability to communicate with—and on behalf of—them grew from my childhood and my travels; I gravitated towards people and countries whose verbal language was unfamiliar to me. In these settings, I realized that communication precedes speech; *what comes before we speak* matters most. When I could not understand the words, I began to grasp the language, the language of emotion, which I now call Emotional Language.

The purpose of this handbook is two-fold. First, it will reacquaint you with your Emotional Language and demonstrate why it is integral to your everyday communication and understanding. The material and its presentation are designed for you to easily understand and integrate Emotional Language into your professional and personal lives. Secondly, having personally experienced a void in education and training to prepare human services professionals, teachers, caregivers, volunteers, and parents for effective service and care, I offer this handbook in an effort to drive the development of Emotional Language competencies. When we become literate in Emotional Language, we become empowered to meet each other's individual needs.

In Emotional Language, nothing is insignificant and everything matters. This subject is at the core of any healthy, interpersonal relationship. Developing the skill to interpret or translate Emotional Language gives us the essential tools to connect with one another. You will realize the depth and importance of this subject as you begin to apply the lessons from this handbook.

Each chapter shows *what* you can learn from your senses and *how* this knowledge can be evaluated and employed. As your understanding of Emotional Language grows, so will your confidence and competence. To facilitate your fluency, engaging and reflective exercises are included. Please note: if you are reading a digital version you will need pen and paper to complete the exercises.

I begin this handbook with the story of my journey, *On Becoming Fluent*. It communicates how I came to understand and appreciate the value and universal nature of Emotional Language. Chapter two introduces the critical elements of the philosophical art that influence the depth of understanding and how you apply Emotional Language in your daily communication. Chapter three focuses on the two fundamental experiences that affect communication, insecurity and security, and the way they are expressed biologically. Included is an identifiable and practical compilation of emotional expressions, organized by corresponding sections of the body. Chapter four covers the critically important issues of power and ethics when engaging in Emotional Language. Chapter five discusses the science behind Emotional Language, describing the biological process of an experience as it affects your body and how it is expressed. The final chapter analyzes four case studies to underscore the significant elements at play within an experience as they pertain to the application of Emotional Language. It also suggests ways to start developing your own Emotional Language skills to use in your work and personal life.

Because you do not yet know how the following information will migrate from these pages into your everyday experiences, read patiently. Let the significance of Emotional Language unfold as you communicate with others.

—Zaki Huq  
Emotional Language Consulting  
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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### On Becoming Fluent

The place where my home stood was literally at the crossroads of the modern and ancient world. The area was called the “Great Emptiness.” To the west, the people lived in a village where time stood still and the wilderness surrounded them. It was the home of wild animals. Our house was a two-story building with bars on the windows. They were there to keep the daring monkeys out.

The red clay path that connected the villagers to the modern world was squeezed between the river and the boundary of our house. The villagers travelled by walking and on moonless nights this and all the other paths were darker than the darkest abyss. The village had a well in the center, but no electricity. The people made a living as their ancestors had done for centuries, as farmers and fisherman.

To the east, modernity reigned. Here people made a living with industrial tools and intellectual professions, and they travelled by car. This is where the diplomats lived, and beyond them the country’s air force base lay. The base was off limits, but I often roamed where the foreigners lived. Their houses were big, and their night sky was illuminated by powerful street lights. I mostly saw their shadows and pieces of their appearance through their high metal gates.

My school was to the east and my playground was to the west. From the upstairs veranda, I could soak up the sunrise and sunset over both these worlds. My home and family were both the center of my universe and my gateway into whatever world I chose to be in. Living in such a juncture allowed me to weave my experiences into many discoveries, near misses, and disasters that left my parents not always amused. For me, everyday was an adventure in tropical Asia.

The time we lived in required us to understand other people's intentions and motivations through their behaviors. In the midst of war, differences in languages, religious practices, and political affiliations matter more than in times of peace. In addition, there were differences of philosophy and socioeconomics that I observed as people engaged with my family. Heightened observation was essential for my survival. Consequently, I developed an acute awareness of subtle behavioral changes and the implications of a single word within the context of public and private communication. The spoken language I grew up with did not use words for "please" or "thank you"; these courtesies were not required. Rather, these expressions of humility and gratitude were simply understood by the way in which a request was delivered or received. When two individuals moved closer to one another, they were showing emotional connection; when they moved away from one another, they were signaling an emotional distance. I observed their movements and learned to understand the meaning of their emotions.

The clouds of one war passed when I was three; however, another loomed on the horizon, finally coming to a genocidal end when I was nine. War either confines you to eternal darkness or gives you great awareness. I witnessed how humans are capable of inflicting unimaginable pain and suffering on others and what we are all capable of doing to ensure survival. I learned that war strips away frivolity and demands only the essentials.

As a child, I quickly realized life and death were two sides of the same coin. They were discussed daily at the dinner table between my father, a surgeon, and my mother, a surgical nurse, and were witnessed by my two sisters and me. Being exposed to the fusion of sickness, health, happiness, and despair of the young and the old gave me the luxury of observing human behavior at its most bare. Besides watching the fragility of life unfold, discussions at home focused on science, history, and geography as well as power and privilege.

I walked with my father on his pre and post-surgical rounds as he talked about his patients who might or might not live. Seeing him face-to-face at their bedsides intensified my desire--the desire we all have--to live, feel secure, and seek comfort. It revealed to me the power and effect we have on others by our mere presence, our acts of caring, and our genuine desire to help.



Being exposed to his work at a young age also made me understand how the distance or barriers we create can shield us from experiences that make us uncomfortable. This I learned when I was asked to take photographs of a surgical procedure. I watched my father cut into the skin and flesh of the patient through the opening in the drape that covered the patient's body. I quickly realized that having my eye pressed against the viewfinder was the best place for me. Having the patient covered afforded me comfort and detachment during this experience. As long as the human form remained altered or fragmented, I felt secure.

Equally enlightening was my weekly shopping trip into the open-air village market with my Anglo-Saxon, blue-eyed mother mingling in a sea of dark-eyed, dark-skinned East Asians who spoke a different language from her native tongue. On those days I witnessed the desire to know and understand each other and the spirit of unhindered human affection. In that market, it was not the exchange of money that made people rich but rather their genuine kindness.

My childhood was filled with emotional contrasts, in that I played with the girls and their dolls and ran with the boys and their knives. Life was inseparably tangled with death, young with old, men with women, able with the disabled, rich with the poor, and the literate with the illiterate. There was no place to hide or segregate one's emotional reactions to one another.

For me, events, cultures, and languages have spanned countries and continents, crisscrossing each other through neocolonialism, dictatorships, and democracies at a very rapid pace. These experiences taught me that sorrow and joy are universal; all groups and individuals share these feelings as well as the capacity to extend compassion. It was one act of compassion that saved my own family's life on a fateful day during the height of the war. As we stood in the hallway of our home, we were stunned that my father had somehow escaped the clutches of his executioners, covered in blood from their attempt to kill him. Suddenly a knock on the door made us all shudder and freeze in fear. "They" were at the door. The occupying force was out to exterminate the members of society, such as my father, who provided critical services. However, one man had compassion, which gave him the courage to risk his own life and step forward to provide my family safe passage. Just when we thought death was at the door, we were given a second chance at life.

My experience was not mine alone, nor was it unique. For every tragic story there was another that was even greater. Moving across the world, I have glimpsed and tasted the spectrum of the human condition and experience.

Throughout my life, I have learned not to look for words to describe pain or pleasure, as they can both leave you speechless. As a non-English speaker, at the age of sixteen I found myself in an international boarding school on an island off the coast of North Africa. In this environment, the student body and even the teachers operated in social groups dictated by their respective languages and cultures. I spoke not one of their languages. Therefore, I could not rely on a particular language or cultural cues for social acceptance. I needed survival skills of another nature that would allow me to understand and interact with my new environment.

Clarity about what it means to be accepted as part of a family and social group came later when I was living with a North American indigenous tribe. In spite of our differences, they completely embraced me, demonstrating the power of social acceptance. It was not the words I used or the gifts I bore that allowed me to enter their homes and share their lives; rather, it was the speed in which I entered their personal space and how much I valued and respected their experience that governed the interaction.

Speed creates friction and friction creates energy or heat. I observed this same phenomenon during my interaction and communication with the people of this tribe. If the speed of my communication was too rapid, I created friction and misunderstanding ensued. Exceeding the optimum speed did not allow me to remain in sync or maintain a comfortable rhythm with them. It created heat that scalded the other and brought about confusion.

I practiced synchronizing my sensory perception with the people of the tribe. I followed their lead, altering my speed—walking, not running—so as not to scald, burn, or leave one behind but to create warmth, comfort, and the desire to stay together. This pace allowed me to be more aware of the details of how we made each other feel and how my behavior impacted their individual experiences. It allowed me to understand that our perceived differences were only a temporary and superficial illusion.

Over time I discovered I was able to navigate easily and move freely within social circles by relying on my awareness of behavioral cues that expressed feelings of security and insecurity. The more diverse the social environment, the more fluid I became in my ability to navigate with confidence within the different groups. My ability to speak a verbal language was no longer a prerequisite for my social acceptance.

My fluency in nonverbal communication was tested in my first job in a European nursing home where many of the residents were no longer coherent or mentally capable of verbally articulating their needs. This exposure to physical and mental vulnerability, frailty, and dependence on others for personal well-being was intense. In the beginning, I must admit, I was unsure of my ability to connect with the residents, so I skirted around them.

What gave me the courage to get involved and not hold back was a memory of a childhood conversation with my mother. When I was ten, my mother and I were travelling back from my first of many volunteer experiences in a transitional home for families who had children with physical limitations. She asked me, “Did you notice how they all like to laugh like you?” She was gently pointing out what we had in common rather than how we were different. She was also highlighting the power of laughter which, throughout my life, has opened the doors of security for others and has allowed me intimate access into the lives of those who were mentally and physically vulnerable. It has been the master key.

Since my time in the nursing home, work has taken me across and deep inside America to diverse communities and environments covering a broad spectrum of backgrounds and ages. I have used Emotional Language to communicate with violent street gangs in California, adjudicated and abandoned children in Arizona, recent immigrants in the Northeast, Native American families in the southwest and the Dakotas, and African-American families in North Carolina. Mixed in-between were toddlers and youth of well-educated, middle class, white America; urban, adult convicts; seniors, human services employees, and volunteers.

These populations were not as different as you might suspect; they all needed to feel secure and they expressed that sense of security or insecurity through a universal language. Their emotional

expressions were the same whether they were well established with secure employment and material wealth or had to beg for food with no apparent personal accomplishments to speak of besides being alive.

Working with people in challenging circumstances has not been difficult for me. I credit this to emotionally aligning my awareness with the experiences of others. As I empathize, I truly identify with their emotional expressions and needs. As a result, in my work I have not had to rely on verbal indicators of a person's feelings of security, insecurity, comfort, or discomfort.

To understand a person without speaking, I discovered I had to physically place myself in the direct line of the other person's experience. To become sensitive to the probable impact of another's experiences, I had to engage all of my senses. I had to risk and abandon my own sense of security and embrace insecurity. To overcome my instinctual defense mechanisms, I had to be relaxed. I learned that without a relaxed mental and physical state, I could not achieve what I call the *principal of uncommitted focus*.

I discovered this principal through the game of table tennis, known in America as ping pong. Because you do not know where the ball is going to be directed, you have to be prepared to go wherever the ball is sent and accommodate its need. When I tried to predetermine its destination, trajectory, velocity or reaction to my paddle, I lost the game. With uncommitted focus, however, my senses were free to adjust to the dynamic changes within the moment of impact. Being open in mind and body, my energy could fuel an internal alertness within both spheres. I became perceptive, receptive, and empowered to seize the moment.

Sensory alignment played a central role in my early work as a facilitator, when I was responsible for the integration of newly arrived Asian and African children into European culture and education. Being physically next to them in the classroom, in the cafeteria, and on the playground, I quickly discovered how alien these places and experiences were for these newcomers. To them, nothing was familiar and everything was new. Imagine finding your way around at such a young age. Could you, even now, learn the basics of a foreign education and language without the support of people you know and trust? Such a burden, born alone, is a monumental task at any age.

Watching these brave children, I began to understand that a person's initial emotional response is a more accurate indicator of an experience than a verbal response. Many individuals fear or shy away from intense emotional involvement, as if a part of them will be lost in the process. In fact, quite the opposite happens. A greater (not a lesser) awareness of self is realized when your emotions become intensely activated. During emotional expressions, we move beyond our own limitations. In doing so, we do not lose ourselves, we find ourselves in someone else. I equate this perspective to walking along the edge of a cliff. The further away you are from the edge of that cliff, the less you are able to see and appreciate the grandeur of the view.

Over the years, I have learned that understanding Emotional Language is an art form that can only be appreciated and utilized when personal inhibitions have been discarded. In my experience, war and life-threatening circumstances introduced me to expressions of security and insecurity. You may experience these expressions in environments that are less dangerous. Any environment that scares, challenges, or surprises you can be a gateway to Emotional Language.

Experiences of security, insecurity, comfort, and discomfort are felt across every continent and culture. They are felt daily in the most prosperous of western cities as well as in the most remote corners of the poorest nations. A teenager who believes he has no alternatives to gang membership, a senior who is neglected, a child whose imagination or fear is belittled, or an ill individual who is deprived of thoughtful care are all entrusted to others—be they community members, care providers, teachers, guardians, physicians, or counselors—who have the power to either offer security or create a state of war by robbing them of opportunity, love, protection, and nourishment.

I experienced this absence of thoughtful care when I suffered a sports-related injury to my neck, which temporarily compromised my ability to function mentally and physically. This debilitating experience made me realize just how vulnerable we all are at any given moment. Although my knowledge of biomechanics was gained through my experience as a wellness advisor for terminally ill and rehabilitating clients, my injury taught me the degree to which we are all dependent on a properly functioning body and how disruptions can significantly affect our perception of all that we experience. Therefore, I believe

educating yourself through study and experience in the subjects of physiology and psychology is crucial for your overall effectiveness as a communicator.

In my mid-thirties I learned to walk, to truly walk, when I began to do so with a friend who was terminally ill. He was being consumed by throat and neck cancer and was no longer able to speak. We walked regularly for over one year, most of it in silence. We spoke in a language that required no words; our physical presence expressed all that we felt. We understood the value of the experience of each step we took, even though each step brought him one step closer to his death.

In my mid-forties I walked with another friend, one with autism. By accepted standards, talking and making eye contact were not his forte. Walking together, we appeared to others to be worlds apart, but nothing could have been further from the truth. Our connection was complete, and our awareness of each other was absolute, yet we were devoid of chatter.

The depth of my friend's awareness of my presence defied many assumptions about individuals with autism. He detected and discarded the slightest intrusion into our world—he was masterful. For him, there was no room in our relationship for physical or intellectual prowess. He was not preoccupied with how much I cared about him or his environment; he just knew if I didn't. He cemented my own understanding that the notion of winning or losing does not belong in any healthy relationship. He clarified how insidious and subversive the effects of glorified or misplaced power can be. This skilled individual helped me realize that Emotional Language needed to be put on paper.

Continuous talking, describing, naming, and theorizing are an obsession for many, and they seldom stop to consider whether these actions are relevant or useful. We possess a cultural tendency to fill the void of silence with words as we fill our homes with possessions. But this compulsion ends when we learn to recognize Emotional Language.

In my experience, when you are truly involved in an interaction and struck by its magnificence, you go beyond verbal conversation. When the involvement absorbs you to the point that you are inseparable from the experience, you no longer remain aware of your own physical body. This connection ultimately achieves zen, the optimal state of sensory awareness, when the depth of communication is no longer defined

by age, color, gender, knowledge, or ability. Emotional Language transcends these barriers and others inherent in verbal languages.

My journey toward becoming fluent in Emotional Language continues to offer me lessons each day. Herein, I share with you my understanding of our most natural and effective form of communication.

## **Universal Mother Tongue**

All languages allow people to come together to share their thoughts, needs, and feelings. Emotional Language is unique because it is innate; from birth, we can communicate with others through Emotional Language. This is the universal mother tongue that is everyone's first language. We learn to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch each other in ways that no verbal language can articulate. Emotional Language joins each of us. We are pieces of a puzzle made not of paper but of flesh, blood, and spirit. The spaces we each occupy through our experiences, behavior, and intellect become mutually accessible, even shared spaces, through Emotional Language. Emotional Language communicates the slightest and the deepest of experiences brushing against your body and mind; nothing escapes its awareness and no one escapes its imprint. It is not linear or subject to human control; it is spontaneous and invulnerable to subjective manipulation. It flows effortlessly at every moment through every fiber of your being. When you rediscover and understand your Emotional Language, you come together with other individuals and recognize your common human experience.

## What is Emotional Language?

**E**motional expressions are your primary physical response to what you experience. If you accept the premise that experiences shape your memory and your world view, then experiences play a critical role in the way you relate to people and your environment. Consequently, overlooking Emotional Language ignores who you are as an individual. No one can avoid the natural human response of expressing emotions. Emotional Language helps you recognize how an experience affects your body, understand why it is meaningful, and translate those feelings and values to others.

Successful emotional communicators acknowledge how others feel about an experience. This recognition is the most important affirmation in any relationship because conveying that the person is valued as an individual builds trust. Regrettably, the concept of Emotional Language is seldom discussed; as a consequence, it is seldom recognized and even more rarely practiced purposefully. This emotional illiteracy limits our ability to function fully.

Our species relies heavily on vision, touch, smell, taste, and hearing to detect comfort and discomfort, as well as security and insecurity. Yet societies push us daily to verbalize our experiences, rather than develop our sensory perceptions. Using words to effectively communicate our needs or express our feelings about an experience is a gradual process that requires a rich vocabulary and years of thoughtful practice to develop a mature level of proficiency. Contrary to verbal expression, Emotional Language is intrinsic and accessible.

To understand the important role that Emotional Language plays, you need to distinguish Emotional Language not only from verbal language but also from culturally dictated body language. Body language incorporates physical gestures within speech to emphasize what is being communicated. These gestures exist and evolve out of regionally-specific cultural norms. By contrast, Emotional Language is universal in its expressions and biological in nature. How emotional expressions manifest in your body and the meaning they communicate to others are vital to all human interactions. It is these emotional expressions that we will explore in detail in this handbook.



# CHAPTER TWO

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE ART

This chapter introduces you to what I have learned from experience to be the critical elements that develop and purify communication into an art form. To understand the significant influence they have on communication, consider the analogy below.

Imagine a tree that has been shaped over time by an ocean breeze. You do not see the air that causes these changes, only the effects it leaves behind.

