Jacob Morgan 00:04

All right. And it's really just meant to be like a casual chat. So if there's something that you want to talk about that I'm not bringing up for some reason, you could just stop me and be like, hey, you know, this is really important. Can we talk about this? I'm excited for you to stop me. Alright, unless you have any other questions. I'll jump right in. Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the future work. My guest today is Erica Dhawan. She's the best selling author of a very timely book called digital body language, how to build trust and connection no matter the distance. Erica, thank you for joining me.

Erica Dhawan 00:40

It's great to be here.

Jacob Morgan 00:43

Yeah, we were just talking earlier, I didn't know that. We've already been connected virtually via my newsletter. So small world. Absolutely.

Erica Dhawan 00:50

The podcasts the newsletter, the future is now and I love your content on the future of work.

Jacob Morgan 00:58

Well, thank you. And now here you are, we're going to be talking about a lot of this stuff that you're working on. Why don't we begin with a little bit of background information about you your story? How did you get involved in some of the stuff that you're doing and even writing about digital body language.

Erica Dhawan 01:13

I grew up as a shy introverted kid, my parents were Indian immigrants. So at home, we spoke Punjabi and Hindi and at school, I had accented English, I struggled to find my voice. I was the quiet shy kid in the class. I remember, every report card, I often got good grades. But every teacher wrote in the comments, I wish Erica spoke up more in class. And I think one of the ways I was able to find my voice and navigate bridging cultures and differences was deciphering other people's body language, I would at school, watch the popular girls with their heads high, the cool kids slouching during school assemblies. And then at home, I would watch Bollywood movies, if you've heard of Bollywood movies, and they were in all these different languages. And I couldn't keep up with all the languages. So I would study the facial expressions of the characters. And I could read a whole storyline through traditional body language. And that really taught me from a young age that it's not what we say it's how we say it. Fast forward 30 years, I ended up a communication and collaboration experts, we can take our greatest challenges and turn them into superpowers. And you know, Jacob, it was about four or five years ago, that I really noticed something, you know, just like I was an immigrant to traditional body language as a kid. Today, we were all immigrants to this new world of what I saw in call digital body language. We live in a world where we can't just rely on a head nod a handshake Alene in in a sales conversation, to build trust, we have to understand that reading emails carefully is the new listening and writing clearly is the new empathy. And in many ways, me being an immigrant to traditional body language really inspired me to want to help all of us including myself navigate being immigrants to digital body language.

Jacob Morgan 03:15

And it's funny speaking of immigrants, I mean, I also come from an immigrant family, they came from the Republic of Georgia. I was actually born in Australia. I don't have a cool accent because I came here young. But you're right. We're all in some way. Immigrants now with this new way of thinking about work and communicating and collaborating. It's funny, you mentioned Bollywood, I heard you were or are still in actual Bollywood dancer.

Erica Dhawan 03:39
That's right. I even use Bollywood dancing in my keynote presentations. Like audience members out of their head and into their bodies. I think that we've all kind of been sitting in chairs for two years. If you feel me though, they mean, and I think more than ever, we have to remember that we're not human doings. We're human beings. And so I really believe in the power of movement as well.

Jacob Morgan 04:04
Wow, see, you're on stage doing Bollywood. I feel like next time I'm giving a speech on stage. I should try out some of the Georgian dancing.

Erica Dhawan 04:11
Oh, yeah, that's right. It's usually my closing. It's like my signature. But normally, I'm talking about digital body language and the the new rules of teamwork in a hybrid world and then, and then we're ready. We get dancing a little later.

Jacob Morgan 04:25
Yeah, the Georgians dance with a lot of knives and they have all sorts of crazy Oh, that's a little dangerous. I don't think that would end well. For me. I'll stick the stick to the talking for now. So your book, obviously digital body language. It's a very intriguing title. What exactly is digital body language? And how is it different or similar to just body language, which is something that we're all familiar with?

Erica Dhawan 04:50
Research shows that 60 to 80% of our communication is nonverbal, body language pacing, pauses, gestures, tone, but body Language hasn't disappeared. As we've all navigated now the virtual hybrid world, it is just transformed. digital body language are all the new cues and signals that have replaced traditional body language that allow us to build cultures of trust or distrust, show respect and appreciation, or disengagement. And in many ways, they go above and beyond because they provided ways for people to connect and build trust in a way that doesn't require physical proximity. Now, when many of us think of the phrase digital body language, we may immediately think this is about video skills. But I'm not talking about our video cameras, digital body language are all the cues and signals that make up the subtext of our messages. So everything from the punctuation or emojis we use to our choice of communication medium, did we choose to email slack call, these are cues of complexity, urgency. digital body language is also simple things like our response times our design of our video meetings to make them inclusive or not. And it's also simple things like how we write emails and and the tone that we showcase, or, or don't showcase that can either make or break a culture of clarity.

Jacob Morgan 06:20

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Yeah, because I mean, in person body language, I think a lot of people understand, right? I mean, you can see how somebody's standing, you can see if their arms are crossed, you can see if they're distracted with the technology. But on the digital side, you're right. I think a lot of people assume it's just, you know, the posture in your, the camera that you're looking at. But there's so much more to it. It's funny, even sometimes my wife and I, when we're wanting to like send text to friends, or like, Is it weird to put an emoji here? Like, does that sound rude? Right? How long should I wait? It's just like, weird stuff that,

Erica Dhawan 06:56
yeah, these are questions. Because Because we're all adapting in real time, we're becoming fluent in a new language. It's like moving to a foreign country where we're learning the language on the go, we don't have a rulebook in it and a translation dictionary. I'll give you an example. Think of how we show say, excitement or urgency through our traditional body language, we may raise our eyebrows, we may tap our fingers, we may increase the tone of our voice or intonation. Now, in the world of digital body language, we may send a text in all caps, we may use multiple exclamation points, we may, in a Zoom meeting, not only not our head, but share something in the Zoom chat to show that we're really excited or something is really urgent. That's how traditional body language is often translating in the world of digital body language. Another example is building trust, we may build trust through direct eye contact, or a nod to someone or smiling to someone back and forth mirroring them. In a digital environment, we may build trust, in certain cases where we have a fast response time to show that we're on it. Or we have that thoughtful agenda before the meetings. So we know that this person isn't wasting our time, and they value us. This is just simple examples of how the cues, we've all known pre pandemic have had to be upgraded. And they're not going away. They're actually here to stay. And I'd argue digital body language in certain cases is even more important than our traditional body language moving forward.

Jacob Morgan 08:30
It also seems, I don't know if this is true or not. But it seems like more complicated, like there's a lot more stuff to think about. You know, for example, you mentioned like how fast you respond to something. And immediately I was thinking, Well, if you respond to something too quickly, then you basically create that culture where if somebody emails you, you're going to respond right away. But if you respond too slowly, people are going to be like, Why is Jacob upset? You may hear from him, like, and that's just text or email, right? There's so much then you have emojis and caps are not caps. And so many times I know I've been in this situation where I get a text from somebody. And I'm just like, huh, it sounded like they were upset. And in my mind, I'm like, adding a passive aggressive tone to the text. Yeah. But then when you see them in person, they're like, No, that's not what I meant. I was just like, being friendly with you. So it just seems so complicated, and very subjective. Sometimes, Jacob,

Erica Dhawan 09:24
this is why I wrote this book. For years, I struggled with anxiety. I had a boss who had always send me emails that said, thoughts with four question marks. And I kept thinking, those question marks are passive aggressive. You haven't responded to this yet? What are your thoughts? It's not like, what are your thoughts? I'm so interested. It's like thoughts for habits. Exactly. And, you know, I wanted to get to the bottom of it. And so let me give you some, some practices and that's, that's what we have to do. We

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have to build in better practices, to avoid getting emotionally hijacked as we're learning this new language and being immigrants and to evolve with it over time. So let's start with if you're on the waiting and you're waiting for someone to respond, and you haven't heard back from them, number one, assume good intent, people are busy, they have a lot on their plate. If it really is urgent, set a response time expectation, then you have liberty to follow up appropriately. Around that response time, you know, and make sure not to fire drill people if something isn't urgent on their side. Secondly, if you're really not able to hear back from them switch the channel, there are certain people that love a quick phone call out of the blue, there are certain people that hate a voicemail and will only respond to you by email. And I do talk about how there are those that are I call our digital body language natives where they they want to text they want to aim, they don't want the voicemail, they don't want the call out of the blue. And then those that are traditional digital adapters that feel more like true immigrants in a foreign country. And they can't wait to get back to in person, they really want to be on camera for every meeting. And they like that quick phone call. And being able to flex and adjust is important and check our bias instead of ruminating. So those are some important factors when it comes if you're on the waiting side, if you're on the receiving side, there are a couple things that are important one is to have grace for yourself and and set your own priorities your to do list is not your email inbox. And we get way too many emails. So I'm gonna highlight that first and foremost, and give everyone the Liberty if they don't need to respond. But there are cases where we really should. And I've seen relationship breakups I've seen, you know, business failures, I've seen firings if people don't respond to emails, so they don't communicate effectively. And so, you know, simple things like, if you need to get back to someone, but you need more time to think about it, say got it, I'll get back to you Tuesday, right, create some liberty and space for yourself to think about it. I know those that have sent out of offices that have thoughtful responses of how long it will take or when they'll get back to you or who they should really reach out to to avoid not feeling bad when they can't respond to everything. And last but not least, just know when to pick up the phone or switch to the video call. instead. You don't need to respond to every email. I think a lot of this quick five minute interactions have turned into 30 email reply on calls. And we we can end the Reply All epidemic if we bring that back the power of a five minute phone call.

Jacob Morgan 12:43
Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And I'm sure this has happened to you. I mean, as a speaker, this certainly has happened to me. And probably even if you're not a speaker, it's happened, anybody who's requesting information or fees from you, or sometimes reaches out and they say, Hey, Eric, we'd love you to speak at our event. What are your fees, you send them your fees, and all of a sudden they disappear? And like you don't hear back from them? I know this has happened to me

Erica Dhawan 13:04
before. fashional go state?

Jacob Morgan 13:07
Yes. And it's so it drives me nuts. And I hear people in the business world like a prospect will reach out to them, Hey, we want a proposal on this. Can you send us something they send over the proposal, and then they just disappear? Cricket? And I'm always I'm always thinking like what the hell is wrong with like, that is so rude. I mean, what do you what do you do? In situations when somebody goes to you?

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Erica Dhawan 13:33
You know, Jacob, you're speaking my language. And in the book, I have a chapter called Why are you so stressed? And it was because I was so stressed. I wanted to get to the bottom of why we have what I call digital anxiety. And it's because there are four triggers of anxiety that are most common. The first is gonna be my question, which is great. You just you just described which is ghosting, where we have just no response. And and I remember sending those proposals, and I rushed it because they said they needed it by tomorrow, and they get back to me Friday and then crickets. I think again, in many ways, this is really hard, and it's become more of the norm. And there's two sides of the coin. I think the first is in certain situations, we have to stop calling it ghosting. And there are individuals that will just show disinterest or be saying no with a lack of response, unfortunately, that for some that's as rude as not having a firm handshake at the end of a meeting in traditional body language, but that's just their digital body language signal. I'm not interested. You know, on the other hand, I think there are people that just are inundated and don't realize what they're doing. And I think that's a lot of what the goal of talking about digital anxiety is it's to bring awareness of ourselves and the signals we may be sending that could be destroying relationships. with others, and so I think the lesson for all of us is if you can respond and even say No, do it, it's better have the hard conversations, don't avoid them. And if you can't, you know, accept the grace with that, you know, if you get hundreds of emails you can do with hundreds of proposals that you didn't ask for. That's a different story. And that's, that's just spam. I kind of call it I think of ghosts, it less as ghosting, and more as triaging, you know, you're in your unit, you have to focus on responding to those that have that life or death issue, versus those that have the ailments and they can go to physical therapy, and maybe you won't respond or bring them to the back room. So we have to have some grace related to ghosting.

Jacob Morgan 15:45
You mentioned the four anxieties. touched on one Why don't we go through all of the anxieties now that are on this topic?

Erica Dhawan 15:51
Yeah. So let's go through the top triggers of anxiety in digital communication. The first brevity, brevity creates confusion. There pressure to communicate quickly can lead many of us to take shortcuts to leave our context all together. I'll never forget one leader who was reviewing some slides from her team on a video call. And she said something of the likes of let's iterate on this a bit more. But what she really meant was, let's add two more bullet points. She didn't say that she was brief and vague, and they couldn't read her cues. And they spent 40 hours on 10 new slides. Now, imagine how demotivated they felt when it turns into two bullet points. How many of us have been in a situation like that before or God that thoughts question mark, question mark, question mark, question mark email, and felt like something was wrong. I had one client who, you know, sent me an email saying, oh, I need to discuss something with you need to talk about budget, and I ruminated all the night before that, I thought that she wouldn't pay me and we lost, I lost the contract. But then the next day, and I was so angry when I got to the meeting, because it was a brief vague message about budget. And then when I got on the call, she just said, I forgot what budget I allotted to this. Can you remind me what you're charging me like? It's just the this ambiguity. So remember, you know, not to confuse brief with clear yourself, and to try to assume good intent when you get brief messages and ask for clarity. The second trigger, are you

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ready? Yeah. Passive aggressiveness is Have you gotten ever a message that says, bumping this to your top of your inbox, or per my last email or circling back, as I haven't heard from you yet, or whatever it is, you know, I think what has happened is a lot of phrases that in some ways were professional in the past have evolved, just like there's different accents in different parts of a country or different dialects have evolved into seemingly passive aggressive phrases. The problem is many of us often are have the ambiguity of not knowing whether someone's being passive aggressive or not. And research shows there's actually a study called the online disinhibition effect, that shows that we're more likely to interpret a negative tone digitally, because we can't read those body cues that made up 60 to 80%, of how we build trust. And so, you know, when it comes to passive aggressive phrases, I think more than ever, we we have to give others the benefit of the doubt, we have to know when to pick up the phone and not respond to confusing phrases. Sometimes, we checking our if our interpretations are correct, or all we needed some, you know, some people just learn a phrase because their boss used it. But then when they go to a new environment, they realize that it's actually affecting people, especially now in a virtual environment.

Jacob Morgan 18:47
Is there a better way to say that because I, I've certainly used that before, like, hey, just checking in on this. And I can imagine, like, sometimes people have sent that to me, and I get this internal voice, they could have either been saying, Hey, how's it going, just checking in on this? Or the voice could have been like, hey, just checking in on this. And it's like that, how you assume they're talking to you, like totally shapes the tone, and it's oftentimes not accurate sources. Instead of that,

Erica Dhawan 19:15
yeah, there was a study that shows that we tend to hold our breath when we check our email. Often we check our email and we often come with this level of stress or this negative mood to it. And I think a lot of this is about our mindset and and not being so judgmental. About when people are shooting off messages. Yes, I'm a big proponent of not allowing spam constantly. But at the end of the day, it's you know, a people are trying to get things done, and if it's not your priority, let them know but but don't react to maybe a phrase where it could just be confusion. I'll give you an example. I know. A British leader is British. You He started to run a global team and certain team members were in Brazil. And he only found out three months into his job his new role that a lot of the Brazilians thought he was so rude because he would use phrases like, I regret to inform you, and unfortunately, and end his emails with Best regards, because that was part of the culture. But for them, it felt too formal, it felt somewhat passive aggressive, because they liked emojis and exclamation points. And that was part of their culture of connection. So, again, not being afraid to discuss differences, as well as asking, you know, what, in getting that understanding of what others men and knowing when to switch to that phone or video call matters? Should we move to the third one?

Jacob Morgan 20:44
Yes, please use

Erica Dhawan 20:46
slower, no responses. Now, I think this is one of the biggest pet peeves but it again, it ties to ghosting, I think that the reality with slower no responses is the fact that we are all busy. And we have to slow

down to speed up less haste equals more speed. If you really need something urgent, make sure you're using the right channel. Some people get 200 emails a day, don't assume a response within five hours, know when you need to call or text or what the channel is. And on the other end of the spectrum, don't expect a response. If there isn't high trust, or a clear peer power dynamic. There's a big power gap or trust gap, that that actually should should link to the delay in response that you'll get to to the communication that you're having. And again, if you can't respond to the details quickly, just say I got it respond quickly and say I'll get back to you soon that can help reduce a lot of additional stress people have.

Jacob Morgan 21:51
Yeah, I know. That's a huge issue for a lot of people. I've certainly been there as well. You mentioned a story where somebody said they'd get back to you right away, and all of a sudden, it's crickets. And then yeah, it's it's never fun. And yeah, I agree. That's a huge source of stress. But part of me also wonder is if it's at all fueled by kind of social media, right, because we're so used to, like instant communication, instant gratification, the tweets, the likes, the messages, even the text sometimes is that playing a factor in our expectations inside the business world.

Erica Dhawan 22:28
I would argue that it is I don't have a good academic study that cites the correlation. But I think it's not only social media, it's the it's workplace expectations, especially as a result of the pandemic. You know, when when the pandemic hit, I think more than ever, there was this expectation that we needed to be responding to emails faster, or someone wasn't working, they were out of the office, were they on vacation, and not really working. Or we needed to be on every video call together. And I think not only was social media part of this, it's been a part of this slowly speeding up the expectation around responsiveness before the pandemic. But I would argue that the crisis period created this new norm of feeling like you have to be always on and no one's commuting anymore. And people are traveling. So of course, they're in front of the computer, and they can respond in three hours. And I think that is also a big problem. Many leaders now need to set better expectations, they need to redefine response time expectations and different channels to avoid screen burnout, and exhaustion. They need to set more clear norms around time zones and off time and mental health breaks. This is not a nice to have now, I think it's an adverse effect of the overuse of digital communication.

Jacob Morgan 23:57
How important is it to set boundaries in this kind of a scenario or this type of a new world? I would assume boundaries are very important. Write boundaries with yourself boundaries, how you use technologies, boundaries with your team members, your leaders, so that people have those expectations. And they know if it's after six o'clock, I'm not gonna respond to an email right away because I'm with Family, like I'm making dinner, I'm putting my kids to sleep. Or if it's four in the morning, I'm sleeping or if it's on the weekends. I'm doing family stuff. Any suggestions or advice on how to set those boundaries in a way where you don't come off? Kind of like a jackass?

Erica Dhawan 24:34
Yeah, you know, the boundaries have blurred, they just have blurred away too much. In the last 18 months. We we had some normal separation in the past, maybe we left our computer at the office and

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went home and disconnected and then we're charged the next day. And now we take that home and it's in our closet with us till 2am. And so let's start with individual boundaries. You know, I want each Every one of you listening to ask yourself, have you created digital boundaries? And and how do we even start to create them? Well, the first thing we have to do is ask ourselves, what have been our negative work experiences versus our positive work experiences in different digital channels, say email, phone, video calls, you know, I am text messages. And even just doing a little bit, I call it a post mortem or a retrospective of the last 18 months can really help here. So let's think emails, you know, we are most exhausted, we make the most mistakes, when we're overworked when we're typing too fast. So really asking ourselves, when has there been the highest and best use of me and my email communication? And what are my boundaries? Do I need a six to 8pm break? Am I an evening owl, and I need to do my calls in the morning, and then I'll catch up in the evening, whatever it is, for you understand what your routine should look like and would work best. You know, the second thing that's important, not only an email, but on the other channels is to not only understand what your individual mental health breaks are and your boundaries for yourself, but then align schedules with your team. And this is the hardest part, this is where there has been the greatest frustration where someone wants to take off from four to 8pm. But then someone else needs to check in between four and five, because they're with their kids. And it's so hard. And so I would argue that in a hybrid or digital environment in the workplace, we need to have more frequent check ins, we may not need 160 or 90 minute meeting weekly, I would argue we need 515 minute check ins daily, more synchronous check ins but shorter in time and more frequently. And that can reduce a lot of the pains, and not in the lack of feeling of an alignment on schedules. And also knowing when things are should not be done asynchronously, and need the voiceover context. And I think the last thing around boundaries is they will only be they will only be honored if leaders role model them first. And I think that's been the greatest pain point. I think leaders have worked 24/7 Because they're leaders and they want to show influence. But then they're responding at midnight to their team. And then the team members feel that they need to respond to midnight, and it creates this circuitous route. So if you're a leader, you know maybe schedule that email to go out the next day you have to do it that nor set some boundaries that we don't do phone calls, we don't do calls after 6pm. If something's urgent, we'll call that person directly. And we give people time off or to work where they work best before the next day where we have, say 10 to for a call time, or whatever it may be.

Jacob Morgan 27:50
Got it? No, I think those are great tips. I think the last digital sign of anxiety was formality. Which Yes, is an interesting one.

Erica Dhawan 28:00
formality. So have you ever been in that situation I sure have. When someone used to be really informal with you, they text you they use an emoji, they'd say hi with multiple eyes. And then all the sudden, they get really formal, they switch to email and lead with Dr. Erica or refer you to their assistant to get on their calendar. Something's going on there. And you know, it's much much like when you're at a cocktail party, and someone gives you the cold shoulder with their body language. So I would argue that formality itself is not a trigger of anxiety. It's the change in formality when someone goes from really informal to formal or formal to informal really quickly. And so again, if you're picking up on something, if something's feeling confusing, no and to have a quick conversation, if it's appropriate, of

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course, you're selling to someone, you may not be able to do that. But in certain situations, try not to get emotionally exhausted by it and stay in the place of reason and not assuming negative intent.

Jacob Morgan 29:11
Okay, so these are the four things anxiety, digital signals brevity passive aggressive, slow response formality. And when we talk about anxiety, are we talking about anxiety on the person receiving these things? Or in the person who's actually doing these things or both? Like who's, where's the anxiety coming from?

Erica Dhawan 29:29
You know, I think the four these four types of anxiety are most pronounced for someone on the receiving end when they get a brief email when they receive a passive aggressive message when they see the switch in formality or feel ghosted. However, you know, you and I just talked about how the person sending those emails is feeling anxiety that they haven't responded yet, but they don't know how to respond. So I think that this goes back to two other factors. The first is who has more or less power, and the second is how much do you trust each other And, you know, if you are sending information you have to remember, if you have more power than the other person, they may read your messages differently than you would. If you have high trust, you know, it may be much more comfortable to have no response because people just know you're busy versus low trust where quick response matters. So again, these examples are based on trust and power dynamics well as well which shape or digital body language.

Jacob Morgan 30:29
Okay. Alright, so those are the four anxiety digital signals. Now for people who are listening and watching that are thinking, Alright, I want to have better digital body language. What should they be thinking about? Because you know, in person, right? I feel like the advice is fairly straightforward. Focus on your posture, look somebody in the eye, not ask follow up conversations, make the discussion feel collaborative, put away distractions, like you can go through like a very simple checklist. But with digital body language, there's so many tools and so many platforms and so many different things to pay attention to, where do you even begin to make sure that you are having a proper digital body language.

Erica Dhawan 31:11
Because there are so many different digital channels and tools and platforms. What I created is think of it as an Elements of Style for digital body language or rules of the road. And I will argue, just like any foreign country language, these will continue to evolve over time. But there are some higher level principles that can guide us through therapy immigrants in this way, the first principle I call it the Four Laws of digital body language. The first law is what I call valuing visibly. Now, pre pandemic, a lot of the ways that we valued others was the head nod, the handshake, the lean in and a sales conversation. Now, I'd like to say valuing visibly is valuing people's time inboxes and schedules, it's not sending chronic cancellations, it's knowing that at the beginning of a meeting for hosting, we have to think more like a TV show hosts than an office host have that thoughtful agenda have, you know, clear norms of whether they're video on and off and column people instead of just assuming they'll share it is this is incredibly important, especially when it comes to introverts and extroverts. And using simple things like the chat tool can allow many more individuals to share in a way that office settings never included them

effectively. Now, once you really think about how you're valuing visibly and understanding that digital recognition looks different, you you have sort of a guide, to then adapt in different platforms and environments, you know, in one environment and maybe emojis in another, it may be a quick thank you upfront. But you have this higher level principle to make sure you're role modeling that time is respected and best work is acknowledged. The second law is what I call communicate carefully. I'll never forget sending a message to someone saying, Do you want to speak Wednesday or Thursday? And the response was yes. You know, as I shared earlier, reading messages carefully is the new listening and writing clearly is the new empathy. So not being brief, being clear, being thoughtful, instead of hasty can make or break relationships now. And so that doesn't mean we have to be flex and fluid in every single team slack WebEx, you know, you name it. It's about knowing to take a pause and thinking before we type. The third law is collaborate competently. And now more than ever, I think that this is an opportunity for us to be more geographically inclusive of others we never included to fight our proximity bias where we tended to reward those we saw more often even if they weren't performing as well think about that. I'll never forget pre pandemic I was on a conference call three of us were remote. Three people were in the office. It wasn't until the 26 minute of a 30 minute meeting that someone in the office said, Does anyone on the phone have something to share? So collaborating competently is really about understanding that this is not about adapting to a new normal, it's about creating a better normal to not revert back. But ask ourselves, What does great collaboration look like? What are the team moments the team spirit will create in a virtual environment? How will we remove proximity bias? How will we create career development for those that we don't see as often? And that really leads to the fourth and final law, which is trust totally. It's really the summation of valuing visibly plus communicating carefully plus collaborating competently. And that's really at the end of the day about what we discussed before, assuming the best intent, creating those hybrid or virtual water cooler moments. And last but not least, showing our own vulnerability, being willing to get comfortable being uncomfortable and let's be honest, this is hard. We want to have things perfect, but actually it's bouncing back from mistakes from your mistakes. And Echo delays and showcasing that we're listening and that we care that will actually build more trust than looking good on camera.

Jacob Morgan 35:08
Okay, so let me just recap the Four Laws, value visibly communicate carefully collaborate confidently and trust totally. And so you're saying these are like the the four pillars pretty much like if you can implement these, they'll kind of be your basis for creating a positive and effective digital body language.

Erica Dhawan 35:27
Absolutely. And I would argue they will not only allow you to create positive digital body language, they will allow you to thrive in 21st century teamwork. Because the future of work is here. I mean, these are, these are skills that are just as important when we're back into the in the office full time, right, or if that's ever going to happen, versus when we're working remotely or in hybrid fashions, because the opportunity we have now is to break silos across any distance and to create that level of inclusivity. That is allowing certain companies to bring in candidates that weren't in your headquarters anymore, but that are the best of the world because they finally learned they can have remote team members, or to create global partnerships. I know global teams that have said, we feel so much more included. I'm part of a team because of our digital shift. And then salespeople that have completely built a new customer segment of digital first customers who want a completely digital relationship, they don't have

to waste time on commutes, in their sales meetings, they zoom in existing clients to talk to prospects that would have never happened in the pre pandemic sales meeting. But they can bring in these guest stars and speed up trust digitally. That wasn't happening before. So this is our opportunity to thrive if we use it well.

Jacob Morgan 36:47
Have you found in your research that there's some people who are great at like, in person body language, but really bad at the digital body language, or people who are really great at digital body language, but not great at the in person body language? Like is there a relationship between those two? Are they just like totally separate animals?

Erica Dhawan 37:06
This is a really great question, Jacob. There's a couple of things I've noticed, I don't have statistical evidence behind it. But one of the things that I've seen is, we all know that there's traditional body language biases, you know, we tend to listen to those that are taller. If the majority of the room is men, we tend to listen more acutely to men, it's it's an unconscious bias, someone has a deeper voice pitch, we tend to see that as a signal of confidence. If someone has a deep accent or is more reserved in their voice or is shorter we research shows we are not as acutely listening to them or present to their voice in in in a team meeting. And in a digital setting, I'd argue that many of those not all of them have been flattened. So you know, you can be the most vocal using the zoom Chat, where you're not actually a great you know, presenters speaker, a loud voice in the room and extrovert, but you have some of the best ideas and you think better in writing. And but because you're able to share in writing, you have more of a voice. So you've actually found your voice. I know, introverts that have told me I feel like I found my voice and digital communication in a way that I couldn't in the office. You know, other examples are those that were in headquarters in an office versus those that were in other countries on a global team and the the remote workers were just never as included in that headquarters meeting since so this is creating a flattening of that curve, where I'd argue we're going to be much more thoughtful of everyone moving forward. And that's what's required. But I would argue that I do think that there are people that are traditional body language winners. And then I do think there are those that are digital body language winners. And they're different. The digital body language winners tend to be those that were more naturally digital natives that are more tech savvy, that understand the power of these tools and are grabbing onto them to act fast and showcase and use visuals and, and the power of their voice. The traditional body language winners, were those that just won because of bias in the past and their extroverted nature. And I think that the opportunity we all have is to build our skills in both now because they both matter.

Jacob Morgan 39:32
Yeah, that was gonna be my follow up question is because we're talking a lot about hybrid work, which is, you know, blending the in person stuff with the digital stuff that it seems like you need to be pretty effective at both because I know personally, lots of friends, family members, business leaders who are really great in person communicators. They're really good, great, engaging and inspiring and motivating people you know, you see them give all hands presentations. Wow. And then they switch towards this virtual day. Digital Media and whether it's zoom or emails, and it's like a different person. And similarly, I know people who are really great. on the digital side, they send these emails that make you feel

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wonderful and texts that are just like, you know, brighten your mood. Yeah. And you see them in person and you're like, are you what happened? Like, are you a different person? So that's what I'm trying to figure out. Like, if you can be good at one and not the other? Or if you can, maybe bring lessons learned from one to the other one?

Erica Dhawan 40:32
Yeah, you know, I think we we can, we're definitely usually better at one versus the other similar to the ways that if we're more of an introvert or extrovert, we're all on this, you know, on a spectrum with our skills. But I do think that the last 18 months have taught us that we have to flex and get comfortable being uncomfortable. I'll give you an example. I know a leader that used to run those brilliant town halls in the office, he would use his gregarious body language, the corporate communication script would be under him. So he was able to look at people but then check his script. He was bombastic and everything went pretty well, when he tried to do that on zoom at the height of the pandemic, last March in April, it fell flat. It was obvious he was reading a script, people were disengaged, they were insulted like this is so disengaging, and he's not asking us questions, or how we're doing right now. It fell flat. So what we did is we we flipped the script for him, what we what he helped him do is to start sending a video business update one week before the town hall, and ask all the employees to watch it. And then during the meeting, he had an Ask Me Anything format, he became he became skilled and being a TV show host. We're first he'd celebrate his team, he wouldn't call out virtual birthdays, anniversaries, then he'd acknowledge cross silo collaborative efforts from the team, then he would bring in in a team members and an Ask Me Anything format, like a TV show, where people would come on, ask him questions related to the content from the business update, there were hundreds of messages in the chat, he would ask for their feedback. And it's been an amazing experience. And he told me, Erica, I never want to go back to the pre pandemic lecture business update, it wasn't as productive. We're transforming how others engage. And so that's what we have at our fingertips, we don't just have an opportunity to adapt to digital communication, we have an opportunity to connect more intelligently, with our people, with our customers with our collaborators around the world, if we get this right.

Jacob Morgan 42:38
It's funny how more effective you can be when you throw out the script and just act like a human being. Exactly, exactly. Seems like this leader totally transformed, which is great. Yeah, I mean, I definitely think this is something that a lot of people are going to have to be paying quite a bit of attention to. Now, and especially going forward and, and trying to be great at both because like you said, I know lots of stories like that where somebody is good at one and not at the end, especially for leaders. If you're if you're leading a team of people, you really need to be effective at both because that's, you know, people are going to be turning to you for that guidance, that feedback, that motivation, and you got to be able to get it across regardless of the different channels that you're using out there.

Erica Dhawan 43:22
That's right. You know, we we all have to be vulnerable here and ask for feedback. And also check our biases. For example, I know leader who runs a global team, She's based in New York, but she has colleagues in London, Buenos Aires in Sydney, Australia, she found that her colleague in Buenos Aires was not engaging often on video calls. And at first she thought he must be multitasking. Then she said maybe he's not interested. Finally, she said, I should stop assuming value visibly and ask. So she sent

him an I am during the call. And he wrote back, I'm having such a hard time translating three different English accents when English is not my native language and American British Australian accent at the same time. So then we started using closed captioning, they slow down, they recorded the calls these things made a massive difference not just for him, but for many other global colleagues. I love that

Jacob Morgan 44:17
it kind of reminds me of a TED last so and I know this is a weird analogy but interview on the armchair expert where they had Jason Sudeikis talking about Ted lassos character. And they said that the big difference and why everybody likes Ted last so in the characters because he he is a little ignorant, but he's ignorant and curious, like Yeah, he's genuinely not aware of these things. And instead of assuming he asks in a in a genuine in a curious way, instead of assuming the worst from people and he does it in a kind way in an empathetic way. And it seems like a lot of that is relevant for digital body language to is you you shouldn't assume you can be curious, just be genuinely Curious about it. And then ultimately, that'll get you to the result that you want.

Erica Dhawan 45:04
And I think What's hard is we don't see the reaction immediately, you know, when we're in front of someone face to face, we can see if they're excited or on the verge of tears, and then we know how to react. But if we shoot off that email, it's like a black hole, we have no idea they're gonna read it when they're on the verge of tears are excited. And I think that's, that's what we have to get comfortable with, and lead with that positive intent.

Jacob Morgan 45:29
It also strikes me that one of the things for digital body language is like, you also need to be aware of the technology, right? Like, you know, if you're a leader, giving an all hands virtually having a good microphone, or having a good camera, or sending texts to somebody paying attention to the AutoCorrect, and what and what it might say, because there have been some disaster stories out there, but autocorrect does to you. So there's just a lot of like little stuff that we oftentimes take for granted that we haven't had to think about before that now we're really having to pay attention to. Yeah, they're,

Erica Dhawan 45:57
they're the big things. Now, I'd argue they're the new executive presence, simple things like buy a, you know, $25 camera and ring light, like, if you haven't yet, do it. Now, we're almost two years into virtual work. You know, looking into the camera when you're presenting, you know, making sure that you're far away enough where people can see your facial expressions, but also some of your hand expressions and, and making sure that you know, that good engagement with others isn't about just having a fancy video background, right. It's also about asking others to share with you to not assume they'll jump in to create questions and to be thoughtful about how to use tools like the chat and whiteboards and that's when people feel like you hear them you respect and you appreciate them.

Jacob Morgan 46:44
I love it. Well, Erica, where can people go to learn more about you, your book, anything that you want to mention for people to check out and I hope everybody watching and listening does grab a copy of the book because I think we need this kind of a book now more than ever.

Erica Dhawan 46:56
Well, first off, thank you, Jacob. I love your work, and the newsletter, the podcast, all things feature work, you're helping us all thrive. And one of the ways we can all thrive in the future of work is to master digital body language. So you can learn more about my work by checking out the book. Of course, it's available everywhere. You can also check out my website Erica Dhawan calm. I also have a free gift for listeners. If you go to my website, Erica Dhawan comm slash DBL. You can get a four page summary of some of the insights from my book. It's a digital body language toolkit that will give you some more insights as well as a 12 question checklist and find me on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

Jacob Morgan 47:42
Very cool. Erica, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to chat with me really appreciate it. I mean, this was really wonderful insights. So thank you. Thank you so much. And thanks everyone, again, for tuning in. My guest has been Erica Dhawan. Her last name is spelled DHA w a n. So if you're looking for her and her website, that is how you can find her. And I'll see all of you next time. All right, we are all done.