

# CUES

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# The Signals That Are Secretly Shaping You

**H**ave you ever shared a great idea only to find that others didn't get it? You're not alone.

This was exactly what happened to mogul and entrepreneur Jamie Siminoff, the founder of Ring. His video doorbell company made headlines when it was acquired by Amazon in 2018 for over \$1 billion. But before Ring was installed on millions of front doors around the world, it was almost derailed by a single bad pitch on *Shark Tank*, a TV show where entrepreneurs talk up their company to a panel of investors.

In fact, when Jamie went on the show in 2013 to pitch his company (then called Doorbot), *every single Shark passed on the opportunity to invest*—despite strong early sales and traction.

What happened?

The answer lies not in the information Siminoff presented but in *how* he presented it. Virtually every tiny signal, or *cue*, Siminoff shared—through his body language, vocal modulation, and pitch—undermined his credibility. He all but told the Sharks to stay away.

Siminoff had a great idea with huge potential, but with the wrong cues, it crashed and burned. Those *cues* spoke even louder than his billion-dollar idea.

Let's go through Siminoff's pitch step by step so you can see exactly where his cues went wrong.

Siminoff began his pitch with a knock on the door to the Shark Tank. "Who's there?" tech investor and Shark Mark Cuban asked. Siminoff replied from behind the closed door: "It's Jamie?"

This was Siminoff's first cue, or miscue. Instead of *stating* his name, he *asked* it. This is an example of a **question inflection**, also known as uptalk. Research has found that when the question inflection is accidentally used in a statement, it signals low confidence and insecurity. When the question inflection is used with a statement, it causes the listener's brain to question the speaker's credibility. The brain says, "If you aren't confident in what you just said, why should I be?"

Making things worse, Siminoff used the question inflection a second time: "Here to pitch?" Repeating this cue reinforced his lack of confidence—and he hadn't even started the pitch yet! Not a great first impression.

When the door finally opened, Canadian entrepreneur Robert Herjavec gave Siminoff a cue of his own: a fake smile. A genuine smile reaches all the way to the upper cheeks, activating the crow's-feet on the sides of your eyes. A fake smile appears only on the bottom half of the face. Herjavec's fake smile should have signaled Siminoff to change tack. If he'd caught it, he could have worked to build rapport with Herjavec. He didn't, and Herjavec passed on the idea.

When Siminoff finally began his official pitch, things seemingly moved back in his favor. He fielded questions from the Sharks on everything from market size to pricing. Mark Cuban even gave him a "Good for you!" when Siminoff shared that he'd had over a million dollars in sales. Throughout, however, the cues passing back and forth told a very different story about Siminoff's chances.

Three minutes in, Cuban pulled the corners of his mouth down into what looks like a frown but is actually a **mouth shrug**. This cue signals disbelief or doubt. It's a sign that someone feels disconnected or indifferent.

Researchers believe this is because the position of the mouth makes it impossible to speak. It's a nonverbal way of indicating a lack of interest



*Shark Tank*

in responding and therefore a bid to terminate the exchange of information. Cuban was telling Siminoff, “I’m done here.”

Instead of seizing that moment to address Cuban’s disbelief, Siminoff barreled along obliviously. If he’d registered Cuban’s cue, he could have addressed his doubt with a simple acknowledgment: “Mark, I see that you’re skeptical. Let me share some data with you.” But Siminoff could only hear the words—“Good for you!”—and missed the underlying nonverbal message. A few minutes later, Cuban pulled out of the deal.

Of course, Siminoff wasn’t just blind to the Sharks’ negative cues during his pitch. He was also sending dozens of his own. For example, when he mentioned the price of his product, he showed a **one-sided shoulder shrug**, yet another low-confidence signal. Five minutes in, challenged on a crucial point about the future of smart devices, Siminoff gulped a **deep swallow**, a cue conveying nervousness. While all of this is completely understandable—who wouldn’t be anxious defending years of work in front of skeptical billionaires on a TV show—these cues completely undermined the clear and confident words he actually spoke. **A strong idea cannot stand alone. It needs to be accompanied by strong cues.**

Siminoff slipped yet again when he tried to convince the Sharks he didn’t face any serious competition in the space. His answer started strong, but then he leaked a **halt cue**: “We do not have any direct com-

petitors. When I say direct [pause], we're [pause] the first video doorbell built for the smartphone." As you can see, a halt cue is when someone adds an out-of-place pause in the middle of a sentence. Liars halt. So do the very nervous. Since our brains can't tell the difference, we protectively and instinctively worry that someone is being dishonest. Halting can also occur when someone switches from a spontaneous answer to a rehearsed one. This is probably what happened to Siminoff. Having realized mid-sentence that he'd prepped for this question, he switched over to his script. Even though the substance of what he was saying was faultless, the choppy delivery undermined his credibility yet again.

Siminoff made the classic mistake many smart people make: **He focused too much on the *content* and not enough on the *cues*.** Cues could have supported his message, but instead they undermined it. In the end, it was Siminoff's failure as a communicator, not as an entrepreneur, that scuttled his pitch and sent him home empty-handed.

## What Good Is a Brilliant Idea If No One Listens?

Every day I meet brilliant, creative, strategic thinkers held back, unwittingly, by their cues. Aspiring leaders, ambitious professionals, and entrepreneurs like Siminoff are not sending the right signals and are missing the signals being sent to them.

They have ideas but don't know how to share them persuasively. They are underpaid and don't know how to prove their worth to a boss or client. They leave a meeting feeling as if it went badly, but they aren't sure why . . . or worse, they finish an interaction thinking it went well only to be blindsided by negative feedback later.

Hundreds of subtle signals are being sent to you every day. Humans are social animals. We evolved to get along in groups, so we're constantly telegraphing information—about our social status, our potential as mates, and our intentions. Similarly, we're constantly alert to social information others are sending to us.

When you uncover the cues being *sent to you*, everything becomes clearer. You won't miss hidden emotions. You know who and what information to trust. You can communicate authentically and assertively.

When you learn to *send* the right cues to others, people start listening to you, find you engaging, and are more interested in what you have to say. You'll also feel more confident going into your interactions.

The right cues can take a lackluster conversation, meeting, or interaction and make it memorable. Send the wrong cues and potential opportunities are missed, doubted, and overlooked.

Researchers have long known about the power of cues, and most people have some inkling that body language is important. But what most people *don't* know is how well cues predict behavior, personality, and achievement with surprising accuracy. For instance:

- We can predict a leader's charisma based solely on five seconds of exposure.
- Want to know who will get divorced? One single cue can predict with 93 percent accuracy which couples will split—sometimes years ahead of time.
- We can predict which doctors will get sued more often by listening for specific cues hidden in their voice tone.
- When jurors exhibit this one nonverbal cue, it can completely change a criminal's fate.
- Researchers observing speed daters can predict who will trade numbers at the end of the night simply by observing their silent nonverbal cues.
- Want to know who will win an election before it happens? Researchers found that voters decide who is more dominant in just one minute of political exchange, and that predicts their vote.

If cues can be used to predict the outcomes of critical events like elections, marriages, and malpractice lawsuits, imagine what mastering them can do for you in your day-to-day life. My goal with this book is to make these normally invisible signals visible, whether it's in person, on phone calls, in video calls, and even on email and chat. Armed with the knowledge of how cues work, you will be able to amplify your message and increase your impact. And you'll never be underestimated, overlooked, or misunderstood again.

## Why Cues?

Twelve years ago, I made a discovery that profoundly changed the way I communicate. I discovered that there was an invisible language being spoken all around me. It explained why people so often dismissed my ideas. Why I had a hard time building relationships—both professional and social. It's why I felt so uncomfortable, bored, and awkward in so many interactions.

I was sending the wrong cues . . . and missing the ones being sent to me. Learning to decode and *control* my cues changed my life and my career. Now I would like to share that knowledge with you.

I've had the privilege to lead hundreds of corporate workshops, at companies like Amazon, Microsoft, PepsiCo, Intel, and Google, to name just a few. I've been fortunate enough to help millions of students level up their people skills in my courses, and 36 million more have watched my YouTube tutorials on communication. And now I'm very, *very* excited to bring that knowledge directly to you in this book.

My secret sauce is to combine the latest research (including original research my team conducted at Science of People), real-life case studies of success, and fascinating examples of notable figures, including Lance Armstrong, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Nixon, and Britney Spears, with practical strategies you **can** start using immediately.

I have grouped cues into four different channels: **Nonverbal**, **Vocal**, **Verbal**, and **Imagery**. And this is how the book is organized.

First, we will learn about nonverbal cues. Researchers find that nonverbal signals account for 65 to 90 percent of our total communication, yet most of us have no idea how to use our body language to communicate effectively. This is the largest section in the book because it constitutes the biggest channel in our communication. You'll learn to project confidence without having to say a word (which also helps you *feel* more confident too), to quickly build trust, and to have a powerful presence in any setting. I'll show you which hand gestures make you look smart and how to spot hidden emotions.

Next, in the Vocal Cues section, you'll learn how to sound powerful. Believe it or not, leaders actually use vocal cues to influence others. We'll

also dig into why our brains associate vocal charisma with leadership, and how you can build trust on phone calls, on video calls, and in person.

In the Verbal Cues section, I'll show you how to make your emails, chats, and profiles more impactful. Ever wonder why certain people respond slowly to your emails? We'll dive into how to be more verbally engaging and how to communicate with charisma both online and offline.

In the final section, you will learn how Imagery Cues matter more than you think. I'll show you what your clothes, your desk, and the colors you wear say about you . . . whether you want them to or not.

Let's dive in!

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