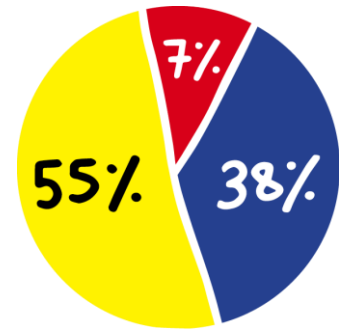


# The 7 – 38 – 55 rule

***‘Most of us have heard of the 7-38-55 rule publicised by the psychologist, Albert Mehrabian’***

... So said the article I was recently reading. I don't know about you, but this rule was news to me!



The rule quantifies the relative impact of verbal and non-verbal messages. When we communicate, the words only have a 7% impact on the listener. The tone we use when we speak accounts for 38% of the impact. 55% of the impact is due to our facial expressions and body language. Actions do speak louder than words!

The words of a song have limited impact – how it is sung has more impact – and if accompanied by ‘body movement’ the impact is considerably greater. The message and its meaning are significantly enhanced and interpreted by our non-verbal language. Deaf sign language relies on non-verbal signals.

If I point to the sky and say – ‘Look at the ground’, everyone will look at the sky – following my gaze and direction rather than the words they hear. Different tones can also change the understanding of the words. The reassuring words ‘I’m fine’ can easily be weaponised by the tone of voice. ‘Sorry’ is another word which is so dependent on tone and body language for the measure of sincerity to be received.

Brief text messages can be easily misunderstood. We may wonder what is really meant by ‘Are you OK?’ Is the message a genuine one of concern? Or a reprimand for not being in touch? Or have I offended this person in some way?

Reading scripture in worship may conclude with ‘This is the word of the Lord’, though sometimes the words feel anything but godly. Our understanding of words of scripture, as we know, is affected by translation and also by what knowledge we have of the age, culture and context in which they were written.

When ‘**The Word**’ spoke in the beginning it was a cosmic explosion of energy. ‘The Word’ came to live amongst us – full of life and light, grace and prodigious generosity in action... **Impact: 7 + 38 + 55 = 100%.**

**The Word** also came to live within us - to ‘speak’ in all we say and do, as Mary Sumner told us. St Francis said: *‘Preach the gospel, and if you must, use words.’*

St Peter said: **‘To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’**

(John 6.68)