



“Why do people always gesture with their hands when they talk on the telephone?”

—Jonathan Carroll

Hand Talkers

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I know you all. You’re a smart bunch. You already know where this is going but you choose to keep reading. Perhaps you’re interested in seeing where I go with it, maybe you have your own opinion, maybe you’re working forward to the radiology angle? Or, maybe I’ll just distract you with the quote. Ever think of that? That would be unfair, wouldn’t it? Nope, we’re going with this line of investigation.

Radiology hand talking.

As we’ve seen in life and famously prodded at by Seinfeld, we’ve got slow talkers, fast talkers, soft talkers, loud talkers, etc, etc. There are also hand talkers. Some are quite good at it; it can embellish a conversation, but it can also be a diversion, much like a magician getting you to look elsewhere while the action occurs to the side. I talk with my hands, but I would categorize myself as a somewhat limited gesturer. I use my hands more to distract you when I don’t have anything particularly pithy to say instead of driving my point home with them.

I have been known to knock coffee over into a keyboard making a point on occasion, however. Not my finest day. Some people literally could not speak if their hands were tied. It’s the broad, sweeping, grand gestures often involving the whole body that I’m talking about. You all know at least one person in this category. So, what if that person is a radiologist? Egads, what if it’s you?

Okay, clinicians in the room gathered around your workstation? That’s easy: Gesture away! Swing your arms, get up out of that chair! Entertain! Enlighten! Mystify!

But what about your radiology reports? How do you “gesture widely around the room” or “jam your finger repetitively at a lesion” in a report? I’ve done emojis before (and unfortunately we STILL do not have the ability to include them in our reports). But what about a gesture? Sure, there is a shrug emoji, but that’s of limited utility for someone in constant motion working their arms, hands, and fingers to the rhythm of their diction. Emojis are a poor substitute for a dedicated, hardcore hand talker.

This question is more than rhetorical. I know a few serious hand talkers and I cannot look at their reports without imagining the hand motions that would accompany the text. Perhaps that’s best; it’s like the book that requires you to picture the events versus the movie that shows you the events — just maybe not the way you envisioned them.

In the meantime, I will continue to champion communication skills that we can all use with our current technology and wish for the day that emojis are welcome in reports. 😊 You hand talkers are going to have to push for video reporting. Use a wide-angle lens.

Keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

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