Do You Know What Your Face Is Saying?

Your face says it all is a common phrase used to suggest that a person’s facial expression reveals what they’re thinking. But, is it correct to assume that a person’s face is an accurate indicator of what’s happening inside? “A lot of times, people are not aware of what their face is presenting.” said LaTrese Ferguson, manager of Workplace Learning and Professional Development in Tech’s Office of Human Resources. “Reading a person’s facial expression

PRIORITIZE WELL-BEING THIS WEEK

Events will take place throughout the week for Employee Well-Being Week, including the annual President’s Walk (and the Petersons’ last as president and first lady) on Thursday, May 16. See page 4 for details.

Tennis Brought Thorne to Tech — Twice

Men’s Tennis Begins NCAA Singles Competition May 20

Tennis brought Kenny Thorne, a 1989 industrial engineering graduate, to Georgia Tech — and, after he graduated, tennis brought him back again. Thorne first picked up a tennis racquet at the age of nine. “It was less expensive than waterskiing,” he joked. He played all the way through 12th grade and even lived with his coach for his first two years of high school, which allowed him to intensively work on his tennis game. “I

Staff Council to Host Spring Splash

Bringing your coworkers and your BuzzCard to enjoy games, snacks, and prizes, and meet Staff Council members. The event will take place Wednesday, May 22, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Couch Park. staffcouncil.gatech.edu

Veterans Center to Host Recognition Event

The Veterans Resource Center will host a Memorial Day Recognition event on Thursday, May 23, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Piedmont Room, Student Center. Learn about Tech’s military history, and honor and remember those who have lost their lives in service to the U.S. veterans.gatech.edu

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EVENTS

ARTS AND CULTURE

May 31
Max Amirz brings his Authentically Absurd Tour to the Ferst Center for the Arts at 8 p.m.
arts.gatech.edu

Through July 12
The Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking hosts two exhibits, Postage Required and Marvelous Marbling. The museum is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
paper.gatech.edu

SEMINARS AND LECTURES

May 15
Human Resources hosts a Be Well session on Deskercise — Exercises You Can Do at Work — from 11 a.m. to noon in the Peachtree Room, Student Center.
hr.gatech.edu/bewell

June 5
Human Resources hosts a Be Well session on Preventing Identity Theft from 11 a.m. to noon in Room 117, Smithgall Student Services (Flag) Building.
hr.gatech.edu/bewell

June 9–10
The Women in Data Science Workshop is the kickoff event of the Data Science Forum and will take place in the Klaus Advanced Computing Building. View a full agenda, learn more, and register at: dsf.ideas.gatech.edu/events/WDSW

June 9–12
The Machine Learning in Science and Engineering Conference, also part of the Data Science Forum, will take place at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center. Learn more and register at: dsf.ideas.gatech.edu/events/mlse

WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING

May 14
The GIFTS Webinar for GTF, GTRC, and GTARC Funds will cover some of the terminology changes, overview the functionality, and demo how to search for gifts within Workday. The webinar will take place from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. via Bluejeans. Register at: transformation.gatech.edu

Tech’s 257th Commencement exercises are in the books. David McDowell (bottom right) served as mace bearer for all four ceremonies, the Glee Club serenaded guests (above), and students made memories even before they crossed the stage. For more photos and videos from all four ceremonies and the President’s Graduation Celebration, visit commencement.gatech.edu/past-ceremonies.
It's a way for us to say thank you for your little bit of June to finetune a few things, but before.

They may not have been in this type of role out who they are as a leader because many of them goes nonstop until August," he said. "Every session for campus, when sessions are taking place. But for Edmonds-King, it really begins in September when the next executive board is chosen. And there are 96 orientation leaders who work with incoming students, answering their questions, getting them to academic advising, and registering them for their first semester of classes.

A lot of Edmonds-King’s job centers around developing the leadership board, training and developing the orientation leaders, and helping to prepare them for their role during the summer. June, July, and August is FASET season for campus, when sessions are taking place. But for Edmonds-King, it really begins in September when the next executive board is chosen.

It picks up a lot in January when we begin recruiting for our FASET leader staff, and it goes nonstop until August," he said. “Every Tuesday night, there’s a two-and-a-half hour training session. We give them information on campus resources and help them figure out who they are as a leader because many of them may not have been in this type of role before.

Edmonds-King said, “We have May and a little bit of June to finetune a few things, but then we are executing the FASET season.”

FASET leaders are paid a minimal stipend.

Ferguson said, “We have May and a few things, but then we are executing the FASET season.”

In 2015, he moved from Alabama to Atlanta to be with his now-husband Adam, who was already living in Atlanta. He started working at Tech that summer.

“I mainly advise our FASET orientation program, which is our orientation program for incoming first-year students, transfer students, and international students. There are a lot of aspects to that because it really is an Institute-wide program,” Edmonds-King said. “We have a lot of campus partners outside of the Division of Student Life who are involved in orienting students to life at Tech including the Office of Undergraduate Education, Academic Advising, Campus Services, and many others.”

FASET has 12 student leaders who serve as cabinet members on the executive board. And there are 96 orientation leaders who work with incoming students, answering their questions, getting them to academic advising, and registering them for their first semester of classes.

The energizer station will be staged on Fifth Street near the intersection with Peachtree Street from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Seminar Room, Krone Engineered Biosystems Building.

May 21

The LGBTQ+ Resource Center hosts a Safe Spaces Day event session from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Learn more and register at lgbtqia.gatech.edu.

May 17

On National Bike to Work Day, join Parking and Transportation Services, Bike GT, and Georgia Tech Police Department as they celebrate bike commuters with free food and helmet giveaways. The energizer station will be staged on Fifth Street near the intersection with West Peachtree Street from 7 to 9 a.m.

pta.gatech.edu

May 27

Campus will be closed in observance of Memorial Day.

May 23

What are GTARC and GTCC? Learn more about the two 501(c)3 organizations to understand Georgia Tech’s research administration. This session welcomes new hires as well as seasoned staff and will take place from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Seminar Room, Research Administration Building. Register at training.esp.gatech.edu.

June 11

A lot of Edmonds-King’s job centers around developing the leadership board, training and developing the orientation leaders, and helping to prepare them for their role during the summer.

“I love cooking. I have a couple of dietary restrictions, which is the executive board. And there are 96 orientation leaders who work with incoming students, answering their questions, getting them to academic advising, and registering them for their first semester of classes.”

Edmonds-King enjoys cooking and music.

“I love cooking. I have a couple of dietary restrictions, so trying to figure out how to make dishes that are gluten-, dairy-, and egg-free is hard, but also a lot of fun,” he said. “Being born and raised in the South, fried okra was huge in my family. Figuring out how to make it in a way that I can eat it was challenging.”

Edmonds-King also loves music.

“Music is the first thing I turn on when I get to work, even before opening email,” he said. “I find the Spotify playlist for the day. I love concerts. But as I get older, the less I get to work, even before opening email,” he said. "I was in a band in college, and we recorded a CD," he said. “It was a worship band called Tame, which is a Hebrew word meaning to thirst.”

Edmonds-King also tried out for American Idol when the show held auditions in Birmingham the year before Birmingham native Taylor Hicks won. He sang a song called Nothing Fancy by Dave Barnes. “Clearly, I didn’t make it!” he laughed.

Ferguson recalled feedback she received from a former manager when she was a college student:

“Even when you have a pleasant resting facial expression, people may ask ‘Why are you so happy?’ You have to find a happy medium, and I don’t know where it is,” she said.

Ferguson said she is glad her former supervisor brought the comments to her attention. It made her aware of a situation that she did not know existed, and it allowed her to think about how — or if she wanted to change it. For those who think people are misinterpreting their facial expression, Ferguson has some suggestions.

First, acknowledge that your face may be saying something very different from what you are thinking or feeling. Second, decide if you will accept the situation as it is, or if you want to change it. Third, if you decide you want to change the response you are getting from others, you should over-communicate your thoughts (instead of leaving it up to someone else’s interpretation), and build relationships so that coworkers will better understand your demeanor or feel comfortable asking you questions instead of making inaccurate assumptions.

“Typically, humans go toward negative thinking, particularly when you don’t ask questions or try to get beneath the surface. So, if I see someone with a blank facial expression, I will just ask what’s going on or ask if I said something that offended them,” she said.

“We have this international campus with all types of people misreading each other. The danger is that when you don’t gain clarification, you are carrying your own biased way of thinking. Sometimes, it can cause unnecessary conflict,” Ferguson said.

Other factors that can lead to confusion or conflict include high-context communication, with one example being a derogatory term used to describe some women’s normal, non-reactive expressions — frequently abbreviated as “RBF” — as unpleasant or even angry. And women with a somber expression might sometimes be instructed — even by strangers — to “smile more,” whereas men who display somber expressions are usually perceived with more gravitas.

“Expressions are driven by many factors: culture, gender, class, education, among others,” said Karen Head, executive director of the Nangle Communication Center (ComLab) and associate professor and associate chair of the School of Literature, Media, and Communication.

“One of the things we always focus on with students in the ComLab is understanding your audience’s expectations in order to prevent misunderstandings. That is to say, your preparations must engage two aspects: understanding yourself as a speaker and understanding your audience’s likely reception of your nonverbal actions,” said Head.

She said that for presentations, the responsibility for nonverbal cues is always on the presenter. But, in everyday, informal communication, there is more of a balance of responsibility.

“Each side should (although doesn’t always) take some responsibility for considering how they might be misinterpreting nonverbal signals,” said Head.

Ferguson agrees.

“It would be nice if everyone would lead with good intent, ask questions, and gain clarification. But that doesn’t always happen,” Ferguson said.

Typically, humans go toward negative thinking, particularly when you don’t ask questions or try to get beneath the surface. So, if I see someone with a blank facial expression, I will just ask what’s going on or ask if I said something that offended them,” she said.

“RBF” — as unpleasant or even angry. And women with a somber expression might sometimes be instructed — even by strangers — to “smile more,” whereas men who display somber expressions are usually perceived with more gravitas.

“These are the faces that our parents gave us,” Ferguson said. “There’s nothing I can do to change my face. Even when you have a pleasant resting facial expression, people may ask ‘Why are you so happy?’ You have to find a happy medium, and I don’t know where it is,” she said.

Ferguson said she is glad her former supervisor brought the comments to her attention. It made her aware of a situation that she did not know existed, and it allowed her to think about how — or if she wanted to change it. For those who think people are misinterpreting their facial expression, Ferguson has some suggestions.

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...
practiced tennis in the morning before school and then had a lesson as soon as the school day was over, followed by a couple hours of group lessons. Then I would do my homework and return to practice late at night.” Thorne also had an academic aptitude for math and science, so when Georgia Tech offered him an athletic scholarship to play for the Yellow Jackets men’s tennis team, it seemed serendipitous.

While pursuing his degree at the H. Milton Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering, he also made his mark on the tennis court, finishing with 75 career doubles wins and a .717 career win percentage as a singles player — the 10th highest in school history. By the time he graduated in 1988, Thorne had set a record as Tech’s career leader in singles victories with 112 wins, a record that was later broken by one of his own players, Guillermo Gomez (a 2011 graduate, also in industrial engineering).

Thorne also saw success post-graduation. As a tennis pro, he knocked off four of the world’s top-10 players in the 1990s and ultimately achieved a career-high doubles ranking in 1995 of No. 67 in the world. Thorne expected to work as an industrial engineer at the end of his pro career, but Georgia Tech invited him back as the head coach in 1998. Since then, the Yellow Jackets have reached the NCAA Championship 15 times. Thorne has been named ACC Coach of the Year twice, in 1999 and 2017, and was inducted into the Georgia Tech Athletic Hall of Fame in 1997. “Anytime you do something for as long as I’ve done it, it’s because there’s a love for it,” he said.

What was your favorite Grand Slam tournament while you were a pro?

Playing at Wimbledon. It’s unique, because you don’t play on grass that often, and there’s so much tradition. And as a tennis player, once you get on the grass, you feel like you’ve arrived.

What is the most rewarding aspect of coaching?

I love to see character growth — to see someone come through the program and then leave a better person than when they started. You can go out and win, but without character, it’s all going to come crumbling down. I love to see my players maturing and growing.

What are the essentials you try to convey to your student athletes?

Honestly, it just comes down to fighting. We all have to persevere through the ups and downs. When student-athletes come to Georgia Tech, they’ve got to embrace the fight. We take pride in Tech being one of the best institutions in the world, and it can be tough. You have to solve problems under pressure, and that includes on the tennis court.

In a lot of sports, if an athlete is having a bad day, they can be swapped out for a teammate. In tennis you either win or you lose — there are no substitutions. So I tell my athletes I want them to embrace the fight, and as soon as they get on a tennis court.

That’s why I love sports: It teaches you things. In a tennis tournament like Wimbledon, there are 128 players, and 127 of them are going to lose. You can gain the ability to make adjustments and lose, but not lose your confidence; the ability to get back up and keep going. That’s extremely important in life.