

# Building Rapport

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## What is rapport

Rapport is a relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement between people. It is what happens at an unconscious level that makes us 'click' and is enhanced by a perception of likeness and liking. It includes the ability to see the other person's point of view (even though you may not necessarily agree with it), and is a vital element in any form of communication, including the business context.

Indicators of good rapport include:

- Similar body posture
- Gesture in similar ways
- Same rhythm in movement and speech
- Breathing levels are similar
- Voice tone

## Why is rapport important?

How often have you heard "She was so rude", "He just didn't seem to care", "You don't understand", "I'm not sure if I trust him". Rapport gives the ability to relate to others in a way that creates a climate of trust, openness and understanding, it is a key part of building relationships in the business world. Having the ability to build rapport helps with:

**Customers:** All things being equal people will have a better experience being served by people they can relate to, and are more likely to do business with people with whom they have good rapport. And by maintaining that rapport throughout will enable us to identify what our customers really want, to help us provide the best services we can, and ultimately increase our chances of further business.

**Suppliers:** Be it your butcher, your plumber or your accountant, having a good rapport usually leads to better service, puts us in a better position to negotiate when we need to, and makes it easier to ask for assistance when it's needed.

**Your team:** Having great rapport with your team will open up 2 way communication and builds trust. You'll get the best out of them if they feel comfortable to make suggestions, they are less likely to be critical of ideas offered to them, and for you it will be a lot easier to call in a favour when it's needed. And it makes for a more pleasant working environment all round.

## How to achieve great rapport

Think of people with whom you already have great rapport. What is it you do, how do you communicate and what do you talk about? All these factors can give us a clue to the key aspects of building rapport. But what can you do in business if it doesn't occur naturally? You need to pay conscious attention to *matching* or *mirroring* (not mimicking) those elements that are part of natural rapport.

Research indicates that only **7%** of our communication comes from the words that we use - for example the use of common expressions, terminology, etc.

How we say things - that is our tone, volume, pitch, emphasis - accounts for a further **38%**.

And a massive **55%** comes from a person's appearance and physiology - how you sit or stand, your facial expressions and so on.

This means that **93% is unconscious**.

So how do we make use of these factors? Well, the closer we can match these (not mimic) to the other person the more likely we are to build rapport.

Let's take each in turn:

### Words

What we actually talk about and the words we use will go some way to building rapport, so listen out for the terminology others use and try to use their terms rather than yours. But this also extends to showing common interests, common goals and common values. So assuming you share these let them know, as these can help to bond you together. A relationship with a customer will be a lot easier if you share something you have in common. This doesn't only apply to face to face communication - it also extends to any other forms of communication - so consider this in your marketing messages, on site promotions and any customer notices or information.

### Tone

A part of building rapport is respecting the state, style and feelings of others – essential factors when dealing with complaints, and staff concerns; e.g. if someone is feeling frustrated by poor service show understanding for that frustration. The biggest impact on this is our tone - Do we indicate an understanding for someone's complaint rather than sounding defensive? Do we sound empathetic towards a frustration instead of sounding irritated by it? And if someone is excited or happy about something, do we also show excitement or happiness, or do we dampen their mood through being apathetic and impatient. The closer you match the other person's tone the greater the degree of rapport.

## Physiology

I am sure you have experienced a time when you have arrived somewhere and felt instantly out of place because you felt either under dressed or over dressed. This is just one example of how our appearance matching those of others helps build rapport. But this aspect also includes the wider and less obvious aspects of our body language, gestures and facial expressions, our breathing patterns, and can also extend to our actions. Next time you are out, just take a look around you and you can easily spot people who are in rapport. The way they stand or sit will mirror, their facial expressions will be similar and the chances are that when one reaches for their drink or to take a bite of food, the other person will do the same. So to build rapport, ensure you match the other person - you don't want to be too obvious about it, but it is surprisingly easy to do this without it appearing as if you are mimicking.

There will be times when someone's tone and physiology are not helpful to achieve your objectives. But, if we respond with a contrasting tone or physiology we will not achieve rapport. Instead we need to match or mirror initially - e.g. an irate guest won't respond kindly to an exaggerated calm approach, we need to put the same degree of energy into our response initially to get into rapport (referred to as 'pacing'). Once we've established the rapport we can then 'lead' by subtle changes in our voice and physiology.

## Taking an **interest**

Rather than trying to be **interesting**, focus on being **interested**. People love it when you show a genuine interest in them, and this is easily achieved by asking questions. This also helps to establish what you have in common, to build on your rapport. Remove barriers by adopting an open posture and uncross your arms, to encourage openness and trust. Smile (assuming it is appropriate for the content of their message), and make eye contact to make a connection also helps to show you're attentiveness and will contribute to building rapport.

## Check your **understanding**

One of the biggest barriers to good rapport is a lack of understanding.

There are two key ways to address this:

Firstly listen to what people are saying and if anything is open to interpretation or ambiguous ask for clarification or examples. We all put filters on what we see: we make generalisations, we distort things to fit our pre conceptions, and we delete things, just focusing on what we need to see. This leads us to make assumptions about what we hear, so we may not always get the full meaning.

It also leads us to use a lot of 'fluff' or vagaries. Ask for examples when people generalise; if they use abstract nouns, adjectives or verbs (such as good, cheap, confidence, communicating) ask what this means, if they use relative terms such as the best, improve, reduce, ask what this is being measured against. This might feel like you are interrogating, but providing you are already in rapport and showing genuine interest it will reinforce this.

Then we need to **demonstrate our understanding**. This is not the same as agreeing; but by putting your self in their shoes, you will establish empathy and further build rapport. Then if you do disagree you are in a better position to put your views across if need be.

There is one killer word when it comes to demonstrating rapport and understanding - the word 'but'. We all know what's coming next when we hear this. Many of us have been taught to replace this with 'however', but this isn't much better; we still know a counter argument is on its way! Instead substitute with the word **and**. *'I see what you mean and....'; 'I appreciate that you feel that way and .....*'

So, remembering that the tone and physiology will be more unconscious ways to build rapport, next time you are in disagreement with someone (i.e. the 7% based on words) work on matching the other 93% - their tone and physiology - and demonstrate you understand their point of view. You'll be amazed at the impact this can have on your ability to reach agreement.

In summary, here are my tips for creating better rapport:

- Match your tone, pace, volume and inflection – without it being obvious – to the person with whom you're talking. I'm not talking about mimicry here, rather a subtle shift in the way you communicate.
- Listen to the type of language and terminology they use so you can mirror this.
- Make your body language open. Uncross your arms; avoid covering your heart and turn to face the person you are talking to. This encourages openness and trust.
- Find common ground from the beginning of the conversation. Generally, people like people who are like themselves.
- Show your interest. Make eye contact and ask questions
- Show that you've been listening by asking appropriate questions. Sincerely. Most people spend 95% of their time thinking about themselves. They love it when you show genuine interest in what they're doing.
- Step into the other person's shoes and try imaging life from their viewpoint. We all have different perspectives on things, so don't assume other people see things exactly the way we do.

The above points are easy to practise – and you'll be amazed at the results.