

Building Rapport Establishing Strong Two-Way Connections

Have you ever known people who have a knack for connecting with others? No matter who they meet, they manage to create a sense of trust and understanding within minutes.

It doesn't matter what industry you're in or what position you hold – knowing how to build rapport can bring you countless opportunities. After all, when you have a rapport with someone, he or she will usually want to help you to succeed.

Some people might argue that this is all a natural gift – either you can build rapport with people or you can't. However, this is not the whole story. Rapport can develop naturally, but anyone can also nurture and improve rapport, just as they can any other skill.

So what is rapport, and how can you become skilled at developing it? We'll examine this, and more, in this article.

What Is Rapport?

Rapport forms the basis of meaningful, close and harmonious relationships between people. It's the sense of connection that you get when you meet someone you like and trust, and whose point of view you understand. It's the bond that forms when you discover that you share one another's values and priorities in life.

According to researchers [Linda Tickle-Degnen and Robert Rosenthal](#), when you have a rapport with someone, you share:

- **Mutual attentiveness:** you're both focused on, and interested in, what the other person is saying or doing.
- **Positivity:** you're both friendly and happy, and you show care and concern for one another.
- **Coordination:** you feel "in sync" with one another, so that you share a common understanding. Your energy levels, tone and body language are also similar.

This connection can appear instantly – when you "click" with someone – or develop slowly, over time. It can grow naturally, without intent, or you can deliberately set out to build it.

Rapport isn't just a tool for building relationships, though; it's often the foundation of success. When you have a rapport with someone, you're better placed to influence, learn and teach, particularly as the trust that you've built up means other people are more likely to accept your ideas, to share information, and to create opportunities together.

Whether you're being [interviewed](#) for a job, [selling](#) something, or trying to [improve a relationship](#), knowing how to build rapport can help you to perform successfully.

Tip:

Rapport is similar to trust. You can [build trust](#) and rapport simultaneously, but rapport focuses more on establishing a bond or connection, whereas trust relies more on establishing a reputation for reliability, consistency and keeping your promises.

How to Build Rapport

Rapport must be a two-way connection between people, so it's not something that you can create by yourself. You can, however, learn how to stimulate it by following these six steps.

Warning:

Use your best judgment when applying these techniques. Be sure not to use them cynically or dishonestly, to sell people something that they wouldn't otherwise want, for example, or to manipulate them into a course of action that's against their best interests.

1. Check Your Appearance

First impressions count, and your appearance should help you to connect with people, not create a barrier. A good rule of thumb is to dress just a little "better" than the people you're about to meet. However, if you arrive and see that you're overdressed, you can quickly dress down to suit the situation.

2. Remember the Basics

Always remember the basics of **good communication**:

- Be **culturally appropriate**.
- Smile.
- **Relax**.
- **Remember people's names**.
- Hold your head up and maintain a good posture.
- **Listen carefully and attentively**.
- Don't outstay your welcome.

These basic tenets form the foundation of great communication. It will be hard to establish rapport without them, as they will help you to establish trust, empathy, and a feeling in people that you are listening to them.

3. Find Common Ground

Identifying common ground can help to establish rapport, so use **small talk** to find something that you both share.

Most people like talking about themselves, and the more genuine interest you show in them, the more likely they are to relax and "open up." Use open-ended questions to discover personal information: perhaps you attended the same college, share the same hobbies, grew up in the same city, or support the same sports team. Even just expressing your shared frustration at the traffic that delayed your journeys to work can help you to draw closer to someone.

Tip 1:

It's important to be **genuine** and sincere, and to avoid overdoing things. Don't make up an interest or try too hard, just to create rapport. Not only can this seem desperate and off-putting, but it can also dent your credibility!

Tip 2:

Laughter is a great tool for building rapport, but do use humor with care. Not everyone can tell a joke, and what might seem like acceptable sarcasm to you could cause offense to somebody else. If you think there's a possibility that a comment might be taken the wrong way, don't make it.

4. Create Shared Experiences

Rapport can't grow without human interaction, and a great way to interact is to create new, shared experiences. Shared experiences can be as simple as attending the same conference session together, or as complex as cooperating on a new management process. Working collaboratively to define problems, devise solutions, and design strategies, for example, can help to bring you and the other person closer.

5. Be Empathic

Empathy is about understanding other people by seeing things from their perspective, and recognizing their emotions. So, to understand and share another person's perspective, you need to learn what makes him tick. As we've already mentioned, many people enjoy talking about their likes and dislikes, needs and wants, and problems and successes, so ask open-ended questions and give them space to talk.

You need to really hear what they say, so that you can respond intelligently and with curiosity. So, it's important to **be a good listener**, and to fine-tune your **emotional intelligence**. You can also use **Perceptual Positions** – a technique for seeing things from other people's perspectives.

Tip:

It's hard to establish rapport with someone who wants to talk only about herself, so try to balance the conversation. Aim to share as much as the other person does. You'll both feel more comfortable as a result.

6. Mirror and Match

Research shows that we prefer people who we perceive to be just like ourselves. Mirroring and matching are techniques for building rapport by making yourself more like the other person. How you do this is about more than just what you say. Psychologist **Albert Mehrabian** found that the words we speak account for just seven percent of our communication. The nature of our voice makes up a greater percentage (38 percent), and our body language makes up as much as 55 percent. So, you'll be missing a trick if you don't consider the "whole picture" of human communication.

So, try these techniques to build rapport:

- Watch the other person's **body language**, including gesture, **posture** and expression. If, for example, he rests his chin on his left hand, consider mirroring him by doing the same with your right hand. To match it, you would use your left hand.
- Adopt a similar temperament. If the other person is introverted or extroverted, shy or exuberant, you should behave in the same way. If he's reserved, for example, then you should be, too, or you'll risk being seen as brash or invasive.
- Use **similar language**. If he uses simple, direct words, then you should, too. If he speaks in technical language, then match that style. You can also reiterate key or favorite words or phrases.
- Match the other person's speech patterns, such as tone, tempo and volume. For instance, if he speaks softly and slowly, then lower the volume and tempo of your voice. (**Research** by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation suggests that this is the most effective way to establish rapport. It's subtle, but it makes the other person feel comfortable and that he's being understood.)

Discretion and common sense are essential when mirroring and matching. Don't, for example, mimic every word and gesture. If you do, you risk causing offense. Be subtle and aim to reach a point where you're naturally **synchronizing** your behavior, so that the other person is unaware of what you're doing.

Mirroring and matching can be difficult skills to master. However, remember that we all unconsciously mirror and match family, friends and colleagues every day. If you want to practice, try using **role playing**.

Tip:

If people know about body language, they'll pick up that you're mirroring and this might have the opposite effect to the one that you want. So, don't be mechanistic – be relaxed and appropriate.

Re-Establishing Rapport

It takes time to rebuild rapport when it has been lost.

First, address why you lost rapport in the first place. Be [humble](#) and explain honestly and simply what happened. If you need to [apologize](#), do so.

Next, focus on ways of repairing any broken trust. Put in extra work if you need to, and keep your word. Transparency and genuine concern for the other person's needs will go a long way to rebuilding trust and re-establishing rapport.

Key Points

You build rapport when you develop mutual trust, friendship and affinity with someone.

Building rapport can be incredibly beneficial to your career – it helps you to establish good interpersonal relationships, and this can open many doors for you.

Follow these six steps to build rapport:

1. Check your appearance.
2. Remember the basics of good communication.
3. Find common ground.
4. Create shared experiences.
5. Be empathic.
6. Mirror and match mannerisms and speech appropriately.

Rapport is best built over the long term. However, you can use these strategies to build it quite quickly, if you need to.

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