

Building rapport

In the not-for-profit sector you're often trying to win people over – to your cause – a commitment to act, or to make a donation.

Wouldn't life be so much easier if you could just get them to understand your point of view and to act on it? But to ensure buy-in on a particular idea or need, it's essential to build a sense of trust and understanding with the person you're trying to get on board. This relationship of trust and understanding is what we define as *rapport*.

Rapport is important in all aspects of work and personal life. For example, when you're:

- at a meeting and you need to get your ideas across
- in a challenging appraisal session with a colleague
- trying to persuade someone to give you a discount in a shop
- trying to make a good impression on someone

Like most management theories there has been a lot of research in this area. Desmond Morris, Erving Goffman, Albert Mehrabian and many others found through their research that interpersonal communication consists of three key channels – *words*, *voice* and *body language*.

In particular, Albert Mehrabian developed a famous 3D model to illustrate the relative impact of these three channels. Based on a careful series of metrics, he established that the relative impact of these key channels can be expressed as a percentage:

- 7% of impact is in the words spoken
- 38% of impact is in the voice
- 55% of impact is body-language

This data is often misquoted to infer that this means the words are unimportant. That's not what this model concludes, as the words are very important! They carry the core explicit message we want to convey.

One important implication is that if someone's words are in *conflict* with their voice or their body language, then we experience a phenomenon called 'cognitive dissonance' – when voice or body language undermines, or works against, the meaning of the words. Simply, it makes us wonder if the person is telling the truth.

So what can we learn from Mehrabian's 3D model? How can we apply certain gestures and techniques to improve our persuasive and influencing skills for positive results? The answer lies in how we build rapport.

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When in rapport, we can see the other person's point of view, understand their feelings, and listen attentively to what they say. It's important to understand that rapport is a *process* and not a *state* – you may fall in and out of rapport over a period of time. Have you ever been to a dinner party and had an engaging conversation with the stranger sat next to you? Then suddenly the conversation dries up, and then you talk to someone on the other side of you, and so on...

Enter their world

So if we know that the three elements are made up of body language, voice and words we can use these to build rapport. This will require you to notice the other person, how they talk, how they sit or move and the type of language that they use. We often are so intent on getting others to understand our point of view that we don't notice the other person and the signals they give us.

You may want to distinguish between three different kinds of rapport-building activities known as the three Ms – *mimicking*, *mirroring*, and *matching*.

- **Mimicking** is the exact copying of someone's body language or voice patterns. This is the wrong path to follow as the 'crude' copying of someone's body language or voice will probably look more obvious and may cause the other person to feel uncomfortable. Don't do it!
- **Mirroring** is the process of adopting an aspect of someone's body language – it's basically a good thing to do. It's often done naturally – for example have you ever found yourself enjoying a conversation with someone, and then noticing that you've adopted the same posture? You can do it consciously to help build rapport by mirroring a number of aspects such as distribution of weight and basic posture, position of arms and legs, and placement of hands. Try to notice how someone is sitting and mirror that. Are they sitting forward, legs crossed? Choose two or three things which you can subtly match to enter into their world.
- **Matching (and pacing)** is like the moving version of mirroring. In this you don't just try to match one aspect of someone's behaviour, you match several – up to three. As well as body language you can try and match some aspects of voice like tone, volume and speed. Because it's moving, and uses voice as well as body language, the rapport effect is stronger.

You can match a range of behaviours, for example: blinking, breathing patterns, tone and accent, speed and volume of speech, facial expression, eye contact, gestures, and language. Spend time to notice the pattern of someone's speech, is it fast, slow, is their voice soft, deep? Try to match them. What are their breathing patterns? (This is a really useful technique when on the phone as you will lose all the signals and advantages of body language). What sort of eye contact do they have, do they look away a lot, or blink often? If they move their hands try moving yours slightly in sympathy (only a small movement but try to match the rhythm).

Moving beyond rapport... leading

Leading is useful when we want another person to understand the world from our perspective or change their behaviour. Once you have built rapport you can change from matching the other person to *leading* them by introducing new behaviour. If you have built rapport then they are more likely to follow your lead. You can lead by changing your body language, breathing, tone, speech, eye contact or language at a key point in the conversation. Perhaps they are feeling nervous about the meeting or rushed? Try pacing them for a while and then relax, slow down, smile and sit back in your chair. If you have matched correctly then you should notice that they have now followed your lead.

It can take as little as 2 minutes to get into rapport. Remember those times when you have come away from a meeting with someone where you felt they really understood you or 'spoke your language'? By using these skills and techniques you can build up a relationship with other people to make transactions easier and more comfortable for both parties.

So next time you have a meeting or phone call you think may be difficult, or an opportunity to get someone to agree with your idea, try entering their world and see how much easier it is for both of you.

Need more help?

Building rapport is just one area of effective influencing and negotiation. **=mc** can provide you with a whole raft of tools and techniques through our intensive 2-day programme ***Influencing and Negotiating for Results***. You will receive NLP coaching, and learn through case studies to help you achieve *your* desired outcome.

Influencing and Negotiating for Results

For further information and to make a booking, please visit:

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