

**Improving your rapport building skills**

Clearly, you can build rapport honestly, or you can use it cynically.

Good team working, for example, depends on good relationships. Honest rapport-building is great for developing these, and it benefits everyone.

However, if you're building rapport to sell someone something that they wouldn't otherwise want, or that will do them harm, then this is cynical and manipulative. Watch out for this type of rapport-building – you may encounter it often!



Building Honest Rapport

Think of how comfortable you might feel if, while living thousands of miles from where you grew up, you met someone from your hometown. That sense of connectedness creates an instant rapport between two people!

When you meet someone new, do your best to find something you have in common. Use open-ended questions to discover some personal information about the person: perhaps you attended the same school or university, have the same favorite vacation spot, grew up in the same city, know the same people, or root for the same sports team.

Remember, any common ground can help establish rapport – it can even help to have an interest in someone's life or hobbies, or to share similar beliefs and values.

It's important to be sincere here; don't make up an interest in something just to create rapport. Not only can this seem desperate; it can dent your credibility!



1. Find Common Ground

How you dress is a key component of making a great first impression and establishing rapport with someone. Your appearance should help you connect with people; not create a barrier.

For instance, imagine you're a sales rep calling on a plant supervisor. You're dressed in a well-tailored, expensive suit. Meanwhile, the supervisor has been working out on the floor all day; he's dressed in jeans, a worn flannel shirt, and work boots. The difference in your appearance is likely to make him feel uncomfortable and perhaps even slightly resentful.

A good rule of thumb is to dress just a little bit "better" than the people you're about to meet. Whenever possible, find out about this in advance. If you arrive and see that you're overdressed, you can quickly "dress down" by taking off your jacket or tie and by rolling up your shirtsleeves.



2. Focus on Your Appearance

Empathy is about understanding other people by seeing things from their perspective, and recognizing their emotions. Once you achieve this, it's easier to get "on their level."

To be more empathic, develop your emotional intelligence so that you can understand others better. You can also use Perceptual Positions – a technique for seeing things from other people's perspectives.



3. Be Empathic



4. Use Mirroring

Mirroring is when you adjust your own body language and spoken language so that you "reflect" that of the person you're talking to.

For example, law enforcement professionals apply the mirroring technique when interviewing witnesses, especially those who have been through a traumatic experience. They might mirror the victim's body language, and adjust the volume and tone of their voice to match the victim's.

Carefully watch the person's body language, including gestures and posture. If the person is sitting down with both hands folded, then copy the person's posture. As the person grows more comfortable with you, he or she may relax and sit back: mirror this change in posture as well.

Mirror the other person's language. If he or she uses simple, direct words, then you should too. If the person speaks in technical language, then match that style if appropriate. When you respond, you can also reiterate key words or phrases that he or she used.

Copy the other person's speech patterns, such as vocal tone and volume. For instance, if he or she speaks softly and slowly, then lower the volume and tempo of your voice. (Research by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) suggests this is the most effective way to establish rapport. It's very subtle, but it makes the other person feel comfortable and, most importantly, it makes them feel that they're being understood.)

While mirroring is useful in building rapport, don't match every word and gesture. Also, do this on a subtle level – being too overt can be counterproductive.

Clearly, mirroring can be a very difficult skill to master. Consider using role playing to practice it.

To use mirroring:



5. Don't Forget About the Basics

In developing rapport with others, you should also use the tried-and-true basics of good communication:

Shaking hands firmly (in cultures where this is acceptable).

Looking people in the eye.

Smiling.

Holding your head up and maintaining good posture.

Asking open-ended questions.

Being sincere.

Facing the other person instead of looking at your computer screen or mobile device.

These basic tenets form the foundation of great communication, and it's hard to establish good rapport without them.

Although there will be times when you will need to build rapport with someone quickly, it's best done as part of a longer-term relationship.

It's important to use your best judgment when applying these techniques – as we've already mentioned, using these techniques incorrectly or dishonestly can actually stop you building rapport with people.



Re-establishing Rapport

Once rapport has been lost, rebuilding it takes time.

First, confront why you lost the 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. Make an extra effort to put in extra work if you need to, and keep your word. Transparency and showing a genuine concern for the other person's needs will go a long way in rebuilding trust and reestablishing 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 opens doors and helps establish good relationships with clients, colleagues, and team members.

To build rapport, use the following strategies.

Find common ground.

Focus on your appearance.

Be empathic.

Mirror the other person.

Don't forget about the basics.

Building rapport is best done in the long-term. But you can use these strategies to build it quickly, if you need to.