

## Creating Rapport In An Interview

### Why do you need rapport?

Rapport is the connection between two people; the spoken and unspoken words that say 'we are on the same page'. It is the art of making someone feel comfortable and accepted. To create rapport, we need to know how to connect with others regardless of their age, gender, ethnic background, mood, or the situation.

This skill is never more important than in an interview, where someone's immediate impression of you is critical. Creating a connection with your interviewer is likely to have a large impact on whether or not they wish to do business with you – so learning the skill of creating good rapport should be one of your priorities as an interviewee.

We tend to be attracted to people that we consider similar to ourselves. When rapport is good, similarities are emphasized and differences are minimized. Rapport is an essential basis for successful communication – where there is no rapport there is no (real) communication! We naturally experience rapport with close friends or with those with whom we share a common interest. However we can learn to create rapport and use it to facilitate our relationship with anybody, even with those with whom we profoundly disagree.

### Developing the skill

In an interview situation you can employ numerous techniques to maximize the rapport between yourself and your interviewer.

### First impressions count

Whether we like it not, judgments are made about us by the way we look, our clothes, hair, facial expressions, and our posture. These decisions will usually be made within the first few seconds of meeting with you. Even before you speak, your interviewer will be absorbing non-verbal clues about you. You will be judged by how you stand, how you walk, how you shake hands, how you smile, and how you sit. That's why it's important to plan your clothes, and even how you comb your hair before a meeting.

The way you present yourself can help influence a person's impression of you. For example, dark clothing suggests authority; lighter colours suggest friendliness or a sense of humour; lots of jewellery suggests power or wealth. Your hair style might suggest sensible, cutting-edge, formal or friendly; your make-up can suggest glamorous or professional.

### Take a genuine interest

Focus on the interviewer as a person and your overall attitude is likely to become more genuine. When you first meet a prospective employer, visualize that person as an important guest in your home. Naturally then, you will be glad to see them, and you want to make them feel welcome and at ease. Your overall goal should be to understand them rather than expecting them to understand you.

However, don't be too friendly too quickly, or you may appear false. Instead, hold yourself back, and increase your level of curiosity. Remember to:

- Smile when you first see your interviewer
- Establish and maintain eye contact
- Be the first to say hello and extend your hand
- Deliver a sincere greeting
- Use the person's name
- Do more listening than talking.

## Match and mirror

Watch two people who have good rapport. You will notice a sense of unison in their body language and the way they talk. Matching and mirroring is when you deliberately take on someone else's style of behaviour in order to create rapport – a way of becoming highly tuned to another person. If done well, this can be a very powerful technique for building rapport in an interview. To do this, you will need to match:

- Voice tone (how you sound), speed and volume
- Breathing rates
- Speech patterns – pick up the key words or phrases your interviewer uses and build these subtly into your conversation. Notice how the interviewer handles information. Do they like detail, or talk about the bigger picture? Feedback information in a similar way
- Rhythm of body movement and energy levels
- Body postures and gestures (don't use this one too often as it can be obvious and may be perceived as mimicking).

The only exception is if someone becomes angry. In that situation, you wouldn't mirror anger; you'd instead express concern.

**WARNING** – matching and mirroring must be carried out in a subtle way. If the process intrudes into the other person's conscious awareness they may become uncomfortable and non-verbal. Rapport using the sound of your voice and your eye contact pattern is the quickest and most useful way to begin – copying gestures should be used rarely. Don't mirror the person exactly; just similarly. So, if the other person is sitting with arms folded across their chest, you may have yours crossed on your lap. That prevents people from thinking they're being imitated.

It may come as a relief to know that you don't have to mirror the other person for longer than a few moments. Once they become comfortable with you, you can actually start leading the nonverbal communication, and then they'll start following you.

Take time to practice this technique prior to your interview until you can use it easily without thinking. That's all there is to it – keen observation and practice.