

Building Rapport With Others

When you work with people, whether it be colleagues, students or parents at your school, the better the rapport and relationship, the higher the trust and the greater the cooperation. Put simply, good rapport between two people is all about liking and trusting each other.

Of course, we often build rapport and relationships naturally and automatically. There are some people who we simply 'click with' better than others. But there are also some people who we need to intentionally build rapport with – colleagues, students or parents with whom we may have a strained relationship. Here are five ways you can build rapport more easily:

Make people feel good about themselves: The general rule is that we like people who like us. So, greeting people warmly, smiling when we see them, making small talk with people who don't know us to help them feel comfortable, all help to oil the wheels of our connections with others. As does giving people positive feedback, making them laugh or showing empathy when there are challenges. Social psychologists call such behaviours ingratiation strategies. Helping people to feel good about themselves not only builds rapport, but encourages reciprocity.

Be genuinely interested in people: People also like people who listen to them and who are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Genuinely listening to people and being present in the moment, also encourages people to return the favour. Team members who feel that their manager really knows them as a person and is interested in their perspective, will be in a much better position to listen to the manager's perspective and more likely to cooperate with change.

Be alert to how you are speaking with people: When you are building rapport or a relationship with people, your tone and body language play an important role. For example, much of what we communicate is through our facial expression, eye contact, and behaviours such as nodding your head to indicate approval or that you are listening. Mirroring, where you match people's body language and tone, often helps to build rapport, that is assuming you are mirroring non-hostile communication!

Treat people the way *they* like to be treated: Treating people the way *you* like to be treated only works if you are dealing with the same type of personality as you. We are more likely to encourage rapport and reciprocity when we relate to people the way they like. For example, while we all like to be liked and listened to, for the high-connectedness people these are particularly important. The high-power people appreciate their ideas accessed, being given choice and they soak up positive feedback.

Find common ground: An interesting part of human nature is that we like people who are similar to us in some way. Shared experiences, values and interests being but a few examples. When you can find points of commonality, beyond just the weather, relationships flow a lot more smoothly.

Here I am reminded of all the different personalities I cycle with. Our shared interest in road bikes or the fact we grew up in the same place or we have children of a similar age, certainly helps to build rapport. Shared experiences together, such as a particularly enjoyable or challenging bike ride, also gives us something to talk about.

How well we build rapport and connect with people not only helps to build trust, gain cooperation, and resolve difficulties that may be there but also develops more meaningful and rewarding relationships. Remember that with both colleagues, students and their parents, it really is all about positive relationships.

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.”

Peter Drucker

Key points

The better the rapport, the better the relationship

The higher the trust, the greater the cooperation

Good rapport between two people is about liking and trusting each other

There are some people who we need to intentionally build rapport with

Generally we like people who like us

Helping people to feel good about themselves builds rapport and encourages reciprocity

Genuinely listen to people and be present in the moment

When you can find points of commonality relationships flow a lot more smoothly

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