

Rapport-building 101

By Samuel Zoranovich

The most fundamental of the skills that I have begun mastering as a result of my work with NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) is one referred to in the NLP community as “establishing rapport.” Rapport is a state of openness and connection that arises from feelings of safety and clarity in communication. When you feel like someone really gets what you’re saying, even really gets you, you’re in rapport with that person. I think we’ve all had the remarkable experience of meeting someone for the first time and just “clicking” with that person; of knowing that you can build a great friendship easily because you’re on the same wavelength, in some way. This is what it feels like when you’re in rapport.

Establishing and building rapport is *skill* that can be learned, developed, and mastered. When you’re able to connect with people in a thoughtful, systematic way, you can talk more directly to their experience of the world, because you’re paying attention to how they’re expressing what their experience of the world is! This means that people really listen to you, pay close attention when you speak, and are far more likely to want to do what you tell them to do. As a Chiropractor, where improving patient compliance is a must, the ability to effectively cultivate rapport is priceless.

The Basics

I in no sense wish to build a comprehensive article on the details of building rapport here - there are nearly infinite details that one could observe and interact with in another person to build good rapport. Instead, I just want to give you a couple of thoughts to chew on and some things to notice next time you’re having a conversation with someone.

Mirroring and matching

Mirroring is the act of consciously adopting another’s behaviors, postural and verbal, when speaking with them. Let’s say I’m standing, talking to Sally and facing her, and Sally is resting most of her weight on her left foot and has her arms crossed over her chest. When I talk to her, if I rest most of my weight on my right foot (as a

mirror image) and cross my arms over my chest, she'll feel more relaxed and comfortable talking with me because my body language is showing her that I know where she's at, how she's feeling, and what's going on with her (providing Sally doesn't consciously wonder why I'm standing in precisely the same position that she's standing in!). She feels safer talking to me because I get where she's coming from. Matching is slightly less powerful for building rapport than mirroring - it's basically the same concept, but instead of standing on my right foot, I stand with most of my weight on my left foot, just like Sally is.

Mirroring and matching are really the key component to all rapport-building, because more than just posture can be mirrored. It's possible to mirror someone's word choice, vocal tone, speed of speaking, breath-rate... you name it! If you can identify a pattern in the way someone is doing anything, you can mirror it and make them feel safer, more listened to, more seen, and more deeply understood.

Pacing and leading

The second basic concept in building rapport is pacing and leading. When you consciously mirror someone's behavior, you build rapport. This is called pacing; you're putting yourself in sync with their rhythms, their patterns, and their way of interacting with the world. Once you're pacing them well and trust and rapport are established, you can begin leading them: when you move your arms from across your chest to on your hips, they'll want to copy you without even noticing that they're doing it. When you step a little away from them, they'll follow you without thinking about it. This is due to the fact that our conscious mind occupies so little of our cognitive faculties, and when you're doing a good job of matching and mirroring, you're speaking directly to the unconscious mind.

Try it at home or the office! Impress your friends!

The wonderful thing about mirroring is that it's a very natural thing to do. Try just emulating the body language of the next person you talk to (subtly! wait 5-10 seconds before copying any major movements), and aim to keep your head angle and vocal tone matching theirs as much as you can. Don't be surprised to notice that the conversation somehow feels more alive, more connected. The communication may feel clearer. If you can keep your attention really focused on both what they're doing, and what you're doing to match and mirror them (and this takes a good deal of practice and presence!), see if when you start to move a bit, they automatically

want to follow you. If they do, you're doing great, keep it up! If not, see what else you can match or mirror to help put them at ease.

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