

Rapport

What you must know about rapport.

Have you ever noticed how you seem to get along with some people right from the start and then there are others that you just are never comfortable with? Have you noticed that some people are easier for you to work with, just talk to or if you work in sales, there are people that are easier to sell to and some people you just can't seem to connect with? It all has to do with rapport. Sometimes it happens naturally, sometimes it doesn't. With a little understanding and a little help we can move the process along.

Rapport comes to the English language from the French and to the French from the Latin. The root meaning in the French is to bring back and in the Latin to carry. Today we use the word in reference to communications and we might more commonly call it feedback. When we say or communicate something to a person and there is some form of communication sent back to us verbally or non-verbally we have some feedback (remember the part about bring back and to carry?) then we are in rapport or perhaps more accurately rapport is at work or you might say we are in the state of rapport.

Since there is seldom a case where anyone would want bad rapport, we focus on good or positive rapport and we forget that rapport is a connection with feedback and it can be bad or negative as well as good or positive. In fact, in some cases bad rapport is better than no rapport, because even in bad rapport at least communications, attention and feedback exist. It can actually be easier at times to change bad rapport into good rapport since there is an existing line of communication than to turn no rapport into good rapport since communications in that case don't exist.

Why do we want good rapport? Rapport in human relations is like the grease in the gears of a machine, without it our relationships break down. It is the basis of our personal interactions. We support and assist people we have good rapport with and we ignore or resist the people we have poor rapport or negative rapport with. Here is a point worth remembering: ***Our quality of life is largely a result of the quality of our relationships.*** If good rapport is basic to good relationships and we need people in our life in everything from car care to healthcare and haircare, then we begin to see how important rapport is to us. Do you want good report with that job interviewer or bad? What about your sales prospect?

I have discovered four basic levels of rapport. There is an additional level, but that is a little beyond this lesson since it touches on romance and is beyond the scope of this lesson. There are lots of details, advanced points and even the order these states occur may change, but when I teach this lesson to people I find that if they understand these four basic levels and a little about what is going on in them it really changes their lives and their relationships. These four levels can be positive or negative levels of rapport. From the other person's viewpoint they are:

In positive rapport

1. You are like me.
2. You like me.
3. I like you.
4. I love you

In negative rapport

1. You aren't like me.
2. You don't like me.
3. I don't like you.
4. I hate you.

Let's go through the four positive levels of rapport.

1. You are like me.

When you first see someone, or first meet someone you take in any information you have at hand about them. You look them over, you listen to their voice, you evaluate not only what they are saying but how they are saying it. You notice how they move or use their body, that is their body language. You gather a lot of information about them in only a few seconds. Your subconscious goes into overdrive processing all of this information. We all run a "program" in our subconscious that constantly looks for danger. If the "danger program" notices some potential threat it will interrupt you in whatever you are doing. If you are watching television and you hear a suspicious sound behind you, your subconscious will take your attention away from the show and you will go into protection mode. You can be driving along in your car not paying much attention on "autopilot" and let something quickly move into your field of vision and you will drop out of autopilot and go into full attention danger mode. It works in a lot of different ways, but just realize we have a "danger program" looking for danger all of the time and all of the information we receive from the outside world goes through this program.

When you first meet someone all of the information from that meeting will be processed in a few seconds and you will determine subconsciously whether that person is a threat or not. The way the subconscious does this is it determines whether that person is like you or not like you. If you are at a coffee shop and dressed for business when someone walks up next to you to order coffee and they are dressed for business you say to yourself, "They are like me, not a threat." You might even strike up a conversation while you wait. Let someone walk up to you wearing some outrageous clothing, maybe even carrying a gun, you say, "This person is not like me, they are a threat." You back away. Have you ever noticed someone unusual walk into a shop or restaurant and people backed away from them?

Here is an interesting point. This decision is based on the conditions of the moment. Someone could walk up to you with a gun and you could be just fine with that if you were on a shooting range with a gun yourself. Have you heard that saying, "When in Rome do as the Romans do"? The first level of positive rapport is, "They are like me." When you do as the Romans do when in Rome you are like them.

The first rule of action when building rapport is to be like them as much as reasonably possible.

I am not saying if you are a man talking to a woman that you wear a dress. That is out of the ordinary and would probably be considered a threat to most women depending on the circumstances. I am saying if you go to call on people for sales that are well dressed, don't wear shorts and sneakers. If someone talks loud and fast, talk a little louder to match them and at about the same speed they use. If they move slow, then you move slow to start. Once it is established that you are not a threat you have more room to change things. You can often get people to follow you after rapport is established.

If you call on people in your work, then try not to stand out as different until you have established basic rapport. Don't wear strong cologne or perfume. Don't dress in a way that would stand out or seem different than expected to the person you call on. Don't use foul language that might offend people. Talk in a way similar to the way they talk. Move in a way similar to how they move. Don't try to imitate them too closely or they will catch on and feel something going on is strange here. You just want to be similar enough that you don't trip the danger alarm and they consider you to be a person like them. People judge you in just a few seconds. Can you see why first impressions are so important?

2. You like me.

The next level of rapport is "You like me." Remember we are looking at this from the other person's point of view. We are more comfortable with people that we know like us than with people we don't know where we stand with or people that we know don't like us. We want the other person to be comfortable with us and what we do. In the first level the message we wanted to send to the person to build rapport was, "I am like you." That is so they will feel like we are like them and not a threat. In this level we want to send the message, "I like you" so they will reach the "You like me" level of rapport with us.

Most people are mostly like most people. If you think people like you when they smile at you, then most people probably think you like them when you smile at them. If people listen to you with their full attention and you think they like you because of that, then other people probably feel the same when you listen to them with your full attention. Pick people in your life that you feel like you, then ask yourself, "What are they doing that makes me feel they like me?"

In general: When you smile at people that makes them feel you like them. When you give people your full attention it makes people think you like them. When you complement a person over some point it makes people think you like them. You can actually tell them you like them after the relationship is moving along. You can say it directly, "I like you," but in some cases that is too direct. You could say, "I am so glad we are getting to talk" or "I am so glad to meet you" or "I am enjoying our conversation" or "I am enjoying this" all of these would get across the message that you like them.

3. I like you.

The next level in rapport is "I like you." We want the other person to like us. There are several ways to do this. One is to like them. It is called reciprocation. If I like you, then you might just reciprocate and like me. Friend someone on social media and they might just friend you back. When you did the things that let people know you liked them in the previous stage you set yourself up to enter this stage of rapport.

We like people that like us. We like people that like the things we do, so find somethings they have done and offer appropriate complements. Not too many. Not too personal. Not too strongly. We like people that meet our needs. We all have a need for the attention and approval of other people. I teach this as the two big A's of relationships so people have a memory aid. Attention and Approval. Give people your attention and give them your approval.

When it comes to approval that is like a lot of other things. If you get something too easy you often don't value it. People don't like the easy video games. If you win too easy that win isn't of value to you. If you make it too hard to win people won't play the game. You have to be like Goldilocks and be "just right" with your approval, not too easy to win it and not so hard to get it that people give up.

How do you do this? Ask questions. A question does many things. A few are:

They show people you are paying attention.

They show people you care.

They can get across a point by assuming it in the question.

They get the other person's attention.

To answer the question you force the person out of emotional mode into logical or thinking mode.

Questions are very powerful when used correctly.

If they make a statement about something at hand, a point about life, how something should be done, what is true, what is false, what is good or what is bad, then consider what they say for a few seconds about two or three and then ask them a question about it that is designed to help you understand what they are saying. Make them work for your agreement and approval, but not have to fight for it. Then when they answer the question to clarify the point, nod your head yes and agree with them. They won't your agreement and if you do it correctly you can get across that you approve of the way they think by saying something like, "you make sense there" or "I wouldn't have thought of that, but it is right."

You aren't looking for total agreement here. Total agreement makes you appear weak, unnecessary and only agreeing to get along. Here is a thought worth remembering. If two people totally agree there is no basis for conversation. General agreement is good. Total agreement on a few things is great. Total, total agreement doesn't go anywhere. Look at these examples:

"I like the Dodgers." "So do I." Where is this conversation going?

"I like vanilla ice cream." "So do I." Great, what is next? Not a deep discussion.

"Sam's over by the airport makes the best hamburgers." "They sure do!"

You can both talk for a little while about how great vanilla ice cream is or Sam's hamburgers, but where is that going?

On the other hand.

"I like vanilla ice cream" "So do I, but have you tried that cherries jubilee ice cream they have down at the mall?"

Not total agreement here. Houston, we have a conversation!

"Sam's over by the airport makes the best hamburgers." "Yes, Sam's makes great hamburgers, have you tried that new place on the bypass?"

We just launched another conversation!

We need attention and approval. We tend to like people that like us. Approval is more valuable if someone has to work a little for it. When we complement someone on something they self identify with that complement. If you like my car you might like me. Ever wonder how many cars are sold because of that thought? We like people that fulfill our needs. So take these bits of information and help people like you.

4. I love you.

The last level I will talk about is "I love you." There is a "You love me" level of rapport, but we don't have to be loved to love someone else and that fact creates a lot of misery in the world. We do treat people differently that we know love us, even when we don't love them so there really is a "You love me" level, but there are so many different kinds of love and people have such different ideas about what love means to them that I won't go through all of that here. This is not a lesson on how to get a mate. On the other hand, in day to day relationships it is valuable to understand the "I love you" level because in some ways and forms it does come up reasonably frequently.

We all need attention and approval. For the practical sake of this lesson on basic rapport I will say that love is not when we just need attention and approval from people in general. For the purpose of this lesson love is when we need or desire a specific person's attention and approval and value it above all others. When a specific person's attention and approval is more important than anyone else's attention and approval we could say that is love. We could also say some other things, but this is a basic lesson on creating rapport to help you in day to day life, not your intimate life. There are so many types of love and so many ideas about love I know I am going to catch some criticism here, but this is just a guide to give people a little help in their day to day relationships, not a guide to romance.

We have the love of "lovers." We have the love of parents for their children. We have the love of children for their parents. We have the love of friends. We even have love for people that we are in close proximity with, such as office workers or factory workers or soldiers in the same tactical unit. There have been many books written on love and there is still much more that could be written, so don't expect this lesson to be the final word, just something to give you some tools to use in casual and work environments.

To reach the level of "I love you" in rapport from the other person's viewpoint you have to give attention and approval in ways that other people do not give them. If you want to be special you have to stand out. These ways must be in channels that are open channels and the needs in these channels are not fully met. We can look at romance and see this easily. "You brought me roses! No one brings me roses!" In romance this was an open channel, no one else was communicating on this channel or at least not at this degree, the roses satisfied a need for romance and attention and you stood out.

Cat Love

This is a little off subject here, but since it is about rapport I think it would be helpful to cover what I call "cat love." My cat is an indoor cat, but he gets outside from time to time. If he has a chance he brings my wife a mouse or a bird or maybe even a snake. My wife hates this. The cat is trying to give her a gift. It is "cat love." The more she flees from the cat and his gift, the more he chases her and tries to give it to her. The cat thinks the gift is a positive and I suppose from a cat's standpoint a loving act of affection. My wife looks at the same event with disgust. There isn't an open channel here for rapport. Another good point is that two people (or in this case a people and a cat!) may look at the same event or communication totally differently and this happens frequently. Rapport is about communication and if the message you are sending isn't the message they are receiving you will be out of rapport or have negative rapport.

Instant Rapport

Sometimes people hit it off just wonderfully right from the start. We even hear a lot of talk about "love at first sight." Did these people just bypass all the steps and stages of rapport and go straight to the top? Not really. When you find yourself in instant rapport with a person you often are benefiting from someone else's work. What you say and how you say it, how you look, how you act, these and other communication characteristics are similar to someone or even several people that have established rapport with this person in the past. You may have said yourself that someone reminds you of a person in your past. I think we all have said that at times. If you were in positive rapport with the person in your past it will be easier to be in positive rapport with a person that reminds you of them in the present.

The second way that instant rapport can be established is when a person fits the ideal someone has about the type of person they are in reference to them. Let me explain. If you are hiring an assistant and you interview a person that fits all of your values and ideas about what an assistant should be, then you are likely to be in instant rapport with that person and they will get the job. You might think they were totally unsuited for a spouse, a babysitter or even a friend, but in reference to what they are in your relationship you find them perfectly suited. They meet your ideal or concept of a perfect assistant. In your mind, they might be too business like to be a nanny. They may not be of the right sex to be your spouse. But, when it comes to an assistant they fit your internal check list for an assistant.

Whether we have give it much thought or not, we all have our own ideas about the ideal boss, mate, mechanic, doctor, employee, grandparent, you name it. When someone fulfills our concept of an ideal person in that relationship with us then we tend to develop instant rapport with that person.

Another way we can achieve instant rapport is when we fill a need that a person desperately desires or needs to be fulfilled. A compliment to a person suffering from low self esteem may make you their best friend in no time. A woman that for some reason feels she isn't pretty might emotionally connect very quickly with someone that paid her a compliment on her beauty. A man that has suffered a setback may quickly connect with a person that tells him it wasn't his fault and blames someone else or some circumstances for the man's failure.

These instant connections can be dangerous. When rapport is riding on one point or just one thing, that one thing becomes extremely important in the relationship. If the need passes, then this connection can go dead like a dead telephone. A lot of "hot" romances cool down quickly because of this. Beware of these one point connections and if the relationship is important to you attempt to establish rapport on other points to strengthen the relationship.

Summary

This isn't all there is to rapport. People are complicated and so are personal communications and circumstances. However, if you keep in mind the things mentioned in this lesson you will find yourself ahead of most people when it comes to rapport and relationships. To finish the lesson I will review a few key points.

We tend to like people somewhat like us. We tend to feel threatened when people are dramatically different than us. We tend to like people that like us. We tend to dislike people that dislike us. We all need attention and approval. You may have heard it said of children if they can't get attention by being good they will get it by being bad. We often are just big children. When we pay attention to people they tend to like us. When we ignore people they tend to dislike us. When we compliment people they feel we approve of them. When we compliment what someone does or what someone has (a car, a painting, a house, furniture, a tie, a dress, jewelry . . .) they tend to identify with the thing we compliment and feel complimented themselves. When it comes to rapport, from a clinical viewpoint love is when you value the attention and approval of one person above others. There are many kinds of love and when dealing with rapport not all love is romantic love. You can be in instant rapport sometimes when you are like someone that person has been in rapport with in the past. When a person is "hungry" for a certain type of attention or approval and you meet that need, you may find yourself in instant rapport with them. When rapport is based on one point, it often isn't stable. Ongoing relationships are a lot like a checkbook. We make deposits and withdrawals. Do something the other person counts as positive and you make a deposit. Do something the other person counts as negative and you make a withdrawal.

The amount left when the withdrawals are subtracted from the deposits is the level of your relationship. In some cases people won't count generally negative acts as withdrawals. You may have heard someone say, "Oh, she doesn't do any wrong in his eyes." Sometimes children can't do wrong in their mother's eyes or even their father's eyes. This is a whole new subject, but just recognize it when you see it.

This is a very basic discussion on rapport, but it is more than most people know on the subject. It is well worth working to improve your relationships since relationships determine much of the quality of our life.

God bless,
Scott Hogue

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