

Day 17 – Rapport

Have you ever had the feeling that you knew someone very well, although you just met them? This is **rapport**. According to the dictionary, rapport is a sympathetic relationship or emotional affinity. Interestingly, the origin of the word rapport comes from French *rapporter* which means to bring back.

Having rapport is a sign that you can efficiently communicate with another person. This does not, however, mean that you will necessarily like everyone you have rapport with, nor does it mean that you agree with them; but it does open lines for communication. Rapport is one of the most important NLP skills used to build a relationship.

From an NLP perspective, the level of quality communication you have with a person greatly depends on the quality of rapport you have with them. When two people have rapport, it opens up channels of communication and more can be said with less words, a greater understanding of each other takes place and an affinity to be like each other happens.

Dr. Milton Erickson was a master at developing rapport with his clients, and there is a good chance he would not have called it rapport. Erickson, being a hypnotherapist, entered into a state he called a therapeutic trance when leading his clients into a trance state. His breathing would change, his pupils would dilate, and he showed all of the signs of going into a trance himself. His students noticed this and asked him if he was entering a trance state when leading his clients and Erickson replied, "Invariably." To this the student asked, "Who is hypnotizing whom in that case?" to which Erickson replied, "Invariably," suggesting that the state of rapport is a loop of mutual

harmony and interaction. Rapport is more like a dance between two or more people than a cause-and-effect relationship.

If you are over the age of three months, you are already very skilled at rapport. You know how to build rapport, use rapport and break rapport. But, how do you do it? Right now, unless you have learned the NLP skills of rapport already, you are unconsciously skilled at rapport. When we ask this question to our students, they invariably tell us that they do things like: talk about the weather, get someone engaged in a conversation, agree with someone about what they are saying. All of these things may lead to rapport; and they may not as well.

The NLP skills of rapport are very simple and were developed by modeling people who were establishing naturally occurring rapport. That is, rapport which was not contrived or developed using any specific skills or techniques. Time and time again, it was seen that people *become like each other* when



rapport takes place. Next time you are in a food court or on a bus or in a movie theater, watch the people around you. People near each other will sit like each other, talk like each other, walk like each other and move like each other. It seems that *when we are like each other, we like each other*.

Let's dissect exactly how to get into rapport using the NLP skills that work so well. While you are learning this information, keep one important thing in mind: you will only use these skills of rapport if you *don't* have rapport with someone already. Because we are all naturally talented at building rapport, we only

have to consciously build rapport when what we are normally unconsciously doing isn't present. So, if you feel a lack or rapport that is the time to use your new NLP rapport building skills.

The first step of having rapport with someone else is to *have the intention* of building rapport. By having rapport with another person, or a group of people – you are more likely to be able to respect their model of the world, gain agreement, sell to them, converse, and understand each other better. And it needn't be a hard task either. The next steps of building rapport include the skills of **matching** and **mirroring** the other person, or people. Matching and mirroring someone else communicates at the unconscious level, and when performed somewhat covertly, it will become second nature to you and you will be able to build rapport with anyone, anywhere. By matching and mirroring someone, you become like them, and as we mentioned earlier, we tend to like people who are like us.

Matching is when you do the same as someone. For example, if we are sitting opposite each other and I lean my chin on my right hand, you can do this exact same move and we are matching each other. You can also match a person's predicates (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), key words, voice tone, volume, pitch, speed, accent, word choice, metaphors, experiences, and non-verbal patterns like facial expressions, physical movements, and posture. You can even match someone's breathing patterns, eye blinking rates, muscle tone, and swallowing if you choose to do so.

Mirroring is when you are doing the opposite of something someone is doing; so it looks like we are in a mirror. Mirroring is most often used with physical movements. For example, if I am sitting by someone and they have their right leg crossed over their left, I may do the opposite and mirror their physiology, crossing my left leg over my right. Mirroring is often less

obtrusive or noticeable than matching when it comes to physiology.

Normally, when you are building rapport, you will choose 2-3 things only to match or mirror. For example, you may choose to match someone's predicates and posture while mirroring how they are sitting. There are a few tips that unfortunately a lot of people miss when consciously building rapport:

1. Match and mirror discreetly. Choose only a few subtle things to match or mirror, move only when you are speaking. Subtlety is the key to elegant rapport building. For example, if you are talking to someone and they cross their arms, when it is your turn to talk, cross your arms when you speak. If they move again, you may choose to alter your position again when it is again your turn to speak. However, if only one of you is speaking, alter your position 15-20 seconds after they move. This way you won't come across as "mimicking," in fact, they shouldn't be able to notice at all.
2. If your communication partner does something that is not comfortable for you, don't match or mirror it. If you do, it will be seen as a very contrived movement.
3. Once you know you have established rapport – you can stop matching and mirroring. Only if the rapport diminishes do you need to start matching and mirroring again.

You can build rapport with more than one person at a time. If, for example, you are in a meeting with three other people, you may want to match one of their predicates, another person's posture, and the third person's physical movements. While it takes practice, it can be done very easily!

Once you are in rapport with someone, the conversations usually flow easier and it is easier to work together. Remember one of the presuppositions of *NLP is Resistance in communication is a sign of a lack of rapport*. Next time there is any friction between you and someone else, ask yourself if you have rapport, and if not – spend 30 seconds to 2 minutes matching and mirroring and you should establish rapport. The more you practice establishing rapport, the easier it will become for you to do these things unconsciously and very quickly!

In addition, when you have established rapport with a person, you can **pace and lead** them to another behavior. For example, if you are talking to a “quiet talker,” match that person’s volume and one other thing. Once you have established rapport, you can begin to speak a bit louder each time it is your turn to speak – and before you know it, both of you are speaking at a “normal” volume. This is called pacing and leading.

A good rule of thumb for pacing and leading is to pace, pace, pace and then lead. Think about pacing like this: when you see two people jogging together, how many footsteps do you hear? Only one person’s because they are stepping at the same time. When one person speeds up the other person follows. If you want to lead someone to a different behavior or state, you will need to make sure that you pace the person adequately at all times and lead them gradually to the destination.

A few years ago, in a client session I (Heidi) had a very depressed young man come to see me for NLP Therapy. He sat down in the chair opposite me, elbows on his knees, and he spoke slowly to the ground. When it was my turn to speak, I took on his same posture, and I too spoke slowly to the ground. After a few minutes, once I could feel the connection of rapport, when I spoke I slowly raised myself up each time I spoke and started to look at him. After a few more minutes of this, we were both sitting normally in our chairs and looking at each

other as we spoke. Not only did I build rapport with him, I also established a feeling of trust between us, simply by respecting his model of the world, matching him and eventually pacing and leading him to where I wanted him to be.

If you have children, pacing and leading is great at the beginning of the day to help get your kids motivated and ready for the day and also great at the end of the day to help get your kids quiet and ready for bed. At the end of the day, for example, when the sky is getting dark and energy levels are still high, you can match your children's energy level and build rapport at that level. Talk in their tempo and volume and then gradually start talking slower and softer. Stay at one level until your child comes to the same tempo and volume as you, and then again drop your tempo and volume and stay here until you lead him to this new level. Keep pacing and leading until the new state is quiet, relaxed and ready for bed. A friend of ours did this so much with her children that she was told by her eldest that she knows when it's bedtime now because her mommy uses her bedtime voice.

If someone has a behavior, emotion, or movement which might not be appropriate to match or mirror directly, you can use a technique called **cross over mirroring**. This simply involves matching a person's movement with a different type of movement. For example, I could sway my head left to right in time with a person's breathing pattern. Or, I could tap my foot to the same tempo as a person who is clicking a pen or tapping a desk. Once I have established rapport with my cross-over technique, I can then pace and lead the person to a new behavior if desired. This can be extremely useful on airplanes. Recently, I was on an airplane sitting next to a person who had nervous behavior. Most irritating (and I say that because it was) was her very quick, very sharp jiggling of her knee. I could see her knee out of the corner of my eye and it seemed that my heart rate was starting to match it. Since that was not my desired state, I decid-

ed to take matters into my own hands. I started to build rapport with this woman. I sat in her posture and breathed in and out when she did. After a few moments I felt a sense of unconscious connection and then I started to tap my hand on my knee in the same rhythm as her knee jiggling. At the same time, I continued to breathe as she was breathing. Then, I slowed down my tapping and after a few seconds, she followed. I kept this new tempo for a while before slowing down again. And, she followed. We kept up this dance for a few minutes, and then finally I stopped tapping my hand and she stopped jiggling her knee. We had silence, visually and auditorily.

At times, it is necessary to **mismatch**, to establish the end of something or to break rapport with someone. Note that it is necessary to have rapport in the first place in order to break rapport. Mismatching is useful to signify the end of a meeting, redirect a conversation or interrupt a non-useful thought pattern. Sometimes we have found that highly kinesthetic people have a hard time mismatching, because it might “hurt someone’s feelings.” Perhaps you know someone that just can’t end a conversation, or that gets followed around by someone they would rather not be followed around by simply because they can’t break rapport. On the other hand, sometimes Internal Dialogue people are known for their mismatching skills – often playing the “devil’s advocate.” While this can be useful in some situations, if rapport is not first established, it may come across as very negative and pessimistic.

Rapport Exercise

In an effort to gain some skills and knowledge of how it feels to build rapport consciously with someone, we offer the following exercise to do a few times each day over the next couple of weeks:

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1. Sit down near someone that you either don't know or don't know very well.
2. Look around you, stare at the floor – do anything you can to not make contact with the person.
3. After about 30 seconds, stop and take notice of what you might be feeling or sensing (if nothing, that is OK).
4. Now, choose 2-3 things to match or mirror.
5. Match and mirror for 1-2 minutes or until you sense that connection and feeling of rapport. There is no need to even talk.

Continue to do this exercise until you can identify what your sensations are when you have rapport, this will help you to know in the future when you don't have rapport and when using your NLP rapport skills would be useful. As your skills of rapport improve, it may take as few as 10-20 seconds to establish rapport.