



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stone

July 2004 – Issue No. 15

Build Rapport for Greater Influence

by David C. Miller

Do you wish you had more impact and influence with those you work with? Do you feel like your words and ideas often fall on “deaf ears?” They may be listening politely, but you have the feeling that in their heads they’re checking out on you!

Maybe you’re not having the impact you want because you’re not taking the time to build rapport with this person. Building rapport is a critical tool of influence, whether it’s with a prospect, client, boss, employee, friend, spouse or child.

Rapport means “to have an unconscious understanding with someone.” It creates a relationship of responsiveness. Isn’t it true that people are more responsive to those who are like them or people who represent who they want to be?

Rapport consists of three things:

1. **Affinity**—a genuine concern for the other person. The old saying is true: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” It’s vital that a person knows that you have their best interests in mind.
2. **Shared reality**—you understand where they are coming from...you have things in common.
3. **Communication**—for affinity and shared reality to have impact it must be communicated in some way.

So how do you effectively establish and build rapport with the people you want to impact? Here are six ways. Begin to incorporate them into your “influencing conversations” and see what a difference they make.

1. Enter their world

The most effective way to enter someone’s world is to ask effective questions about their needs and wants. Don’t assume or try to read their mind. Ask questions and REALLY listen. When having a meeting with someone about an issue, find out what results they want to achieve and what challenges they feel are getting in the way. Find out what achieving those results will accomplish for them. Listening in itself is a great rapport-builder because it is so rare today when someone really listens to someone else.

2. Give them incredible value

If you’re a business developer, this can be a gift, a referral or great service before they become a client. If you work for someone else, learn what your supervisor’s biggest challenge is this year and find a way to go above and beyond your defined roles and responsibilities to help him or her achieve it. Instantly you’ll have rapport by inducing reciprocation.

3. Match their tonality

Mirroring a person’s voice tonality can be a subtle yet effective way to build rapport. If the person you want to influence tends to talk very slowly and you’re talking at the speed of light, chances are you’re breaking some of the connection between you. Try to match tempo, volume and pitch for stronger rapport.

4. Match their words

People’s word choices reveal their learning modalities. Some people are primarily visual. They think in pictures, talk quickly and use hand gestures. Communicate



David C. Miller, FSA, MAAA, is president and professional coach of Miller & Associates Business and Sales Coaching in Newtown, Pa., and a member of the Management and Personal Development Section Council.

*Dave@TransLifeCoach.com
(215) 968-2483
www.BusinessGrowthNow.com*

(continued on next page)

Build Rapport for Greater Influence • continued from prior page

with visual people in terms of how things look. For example, you could ask questions like, “What can you see happening in this relationship?”

Auditory people learn best by listening. They are typically interested in gaining information that includes details and facts and tend to speak in a steady tempo. You want to communicate with these people in terms of facts and how things sound. For example, after you make a recommendation or proposal you may ask, “How does that sound to you?”

People that are primarily kinesthetic tend to talk more slowly and quietly. They tend to operate more from their gut. Communicate with these people in terms of how things feel. For example, you may ask: “What’s your sense about this?” or “What would help you feel comfortable with moving forward?”

5. Match their feelings

People’s word choices often contain feelings that have a very specific meaning for them. You may feel that it’s more effective to para-

phrase someone’s words in conversation, but this can actually break rapport. When a person says they’re frustrated by the way things are going, it’s more effective to ask them, “What about that frustrates you the most?” rather than “What about that is stressful to you?” This is because the word “frustrated” contains a specific emotional picture for them, whereas being “stressed out” probably means something altogether different.

6. Match their body language

This method of building rapport is very powerful because body language represents 55 percent of communication (tonality and words make up the balance). Here you match and mirror things like posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, breathing and proximity. As powerful as this approach is, it is also very risky unless you’re really good at it. Until you feel proficient with matching body language, stick with matching tones, words and feelings—those skills will take you a long way in building rapport. □



Coming in September!

The SOA e-mail newsletter will debut this fall, bringing you news you can use!

Get the latest details about:

- SOA activities & initiatives
- Educational opportunities
- Exam information
- National and global issues for actuaries
- Business news
- And much, much more!

Stay tuned ... more details to come this summer!