

Building Instant Rapport

Old-school persuaders have a tendency to walk into an office and look for things on the wall or a desk to make small talk about. They then use this small talk to try to bond with a potential client. There was a time this technique worked. However, we live in a different world today than we did decades ago. Time is now of the essence. Because your audience is pressed for time, you have to get right to the point. Most people don't appreciate useless dribble-drabble. Research tells us that the majority of people do not appreciate unsolicited small talk, and many find it offensive. People buy from those who understand their wants and needs. As I was doing research for this book, I had a couple of managers tell me that they had removed items from their office (trophies, golf clubs, pictures, fish) so that annoying salespeople wouldn't force them into talking about it—one more time.

How do you make sure you're really connecting? You want to be friendly, but not fake. You aim to be engaging, but not annoying. You're enthusiastic, but not overbearing. If you can harness the power of your "rapport radar," you'll be able to read non-verbal cues, detect unspoken messages, and decipher the true feelings behind facial expressions, body language, and attitude. Instead of taking them through a rigid, preformulated routine, your radar will enable you to monitor their receptivity as you go. Great persuaders customize each presentation. Bringing individuality to each exchange provides the critical vitality to the relationship and dramatically increases the likelihood that your audience will feel a connection with you. Any time we are in need of someone else's input, whether it's for a new product, or just because we need advice on a personal issue, we place ourselves in a vulnerable position. In doing so, we acknowledge that we need help. When in this state, we can usually tell whether the person trying to persuade us has our best interests at heart or not.

We know that when we meet someone for the first time, we are being judged by our past history, communicated expectations (what have people said about us?), our body

language, our tone of voice, and our word choices. Being aware of how you come across to others, therefore, is crucial to your success. We are very good at categorizing people when deciding whether they deserve our trust or our business. To demonstrate, a study was done with students in which they were shown a two-second video clip of a professor. A survey was then given to the class that had just finished the semester with the professor and those who only knew him from the two-second video clip. The evaluations of effectiveness were very similar between the two groups. In other words, the two-second group made the same judgments as the whole-semester group.

We tend to judge rapidly, and that snap judgment is usually correct. When you meet someone for the first time, he will tend to categorize you like someone he already knows.³ The positive or negative characteristics of the person you resemble tend to be transferred to you (fair or not). The bottom line is that your audience is pretty good at sizing you up in the first seconds of your meeting. Great persuaders know how to create magic in those first few seconds, and those feelings will last a lifetime.

The old-school approach to persuasion put a lot of the emphasis on the final outcome: clinching the deal, closing the sale. Back then, it was a lot more about getting the sale than having a true and lasting relationship with an actual person. The problem with being so closing-oriented is that a persuasive encounter is not a static, one-sided arrangement. The “persuadee” is not some brainless lump who will unquestioningly accept everything you say. They are living, breathing human beings, which means the exchange is two-sided. You have to establish rapport very early on, making a good and lasting first impression, *and* you have to keep the rapport going.

Many persuaders don’t know how to maintain rapport throughout the entire exchange. They’re good at breaking the ice and helping their audience feel comfortable, but when it comes to “getting down to business,” all of a sudden their demeanor changes. Their light-hearted, jovial manner may turn into intense seriousness as they launch into

“the bottom line.” When this transformation takes place, what is the audience supposed to think? The person they were joking around with for the past ten minutes has now completely morphed into someone else. Which one is the real person?

There is an interesting correlation between lawsuits and the likeability of a doctor. Malpractice lawsuit statistics show that patients who feel rushed, treated poorly, or ignored (all blows to their esteem) are the ones who are most likely to sue their doctors.⁴ Evidence shows that people *don't* sue doctors they like. This correlation also holds true for you, for your products, your services, and your long-term customer care.

Great persuaders don't focus on their persuasive encounters in terms of initial “kick-off” and final “closing.” They maintain rapport and connection by keeping the exchange emotionally and logically on the same plane. Think of your audience as a friend you will see and do business with again. Do not allow yourself any abrupt mood changes; be flexible and willing to adjust to the many moods and emotions your audience may go through.

It can help to know some of the things your audience may feel. Consider the following emotions that are commonly felt during a persuasive encounter, and understand that you can maintain rapport by being supportive, empathetic, and understanding:

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| • Indifference | • Suspicion |
| • Skepticism | • Inquisitiveness |
| • Distrust | • Surprise |
| • Fear | • Eagerness |
| • Nervousness | • Concern |
| • Interest | • Confusion |
| • Curiosity | • Fickleness |
| • Enthusiasm | • Excitement |