



7 Common Rapport Building Mistakes

-by Thomas Libby



Rapport building is essential in sales, and throughout life, but particularly important in the sales environment. Oddly, people make assumptions that just talking to another person and building a rapport are the same thing. Rapport building is a skill that you can work on, a skill that you can improve on and talking is well, just that, talking. Not to say that you can't improve on the way you speak or the articulation of words...anyone ever hear an accent from Boston, New York, or any southern state. All different but all distinct, so you can improve the way you talk to eliminate accents and in turn improve the acceptance of your accent. This is very different from improving your skill at building rapport. Within the framework of building rapport, you are also building trust, allows for pre-discovery type questions (fact finding), developing the environment that you sell best in (peer to peer, seen as an expert, seen as the answer to a major issue, etc.) among other things. Rapport also allows you to set the ground work for all subsequent interactions. The key is to not make the rapport building mistakes that are common in some of today's selling situations. Here are a few to avoid and practice how to develop a great skill at rapport building.

Don't talk too much – Sometimes the best start to good rapport is a great beginning question...and NO not about the weather or the game! (Unless of course the weather or the game have a direct link to your business together) Make the question business related but friendly at the same time. However, you can't think of anything but the weather, try something like this: "What a time to be a plow driver, huh? All this snow must make them a ton of money, I wonder how it effects other businesses? Does it impact yours?" Again, once you ask a question, don't interrupt, allow your client or prospect to answer as they wish. Never over talk them or rudely cut them off.

Don't make the questions so direct that they could be uncomfortable – People in general like conversations but not usually like being put on the spot. This could be particularly poor if there are multiple people in the decision-making process and you're asking one what their authority is in this process in front of the "team". Asking a more indirect



question could help you uncover the same information without singling anyone out. “Will this decision be made collectively?” This question can come in handy if you’re meeting one person or a team of people, either way you can learn vital intel.

Don’t forget that rapport building is also fact finding – Until the sale is closed your job should to always be gathering information and then as a customer retention tool...keep gathering information. Rapport is just the beginning stage of this. You start by doing your homework, research the company, the decision maker, and whoever else may end up in the room. You can even start the rapport by asking what lead the prospect or client to agree to meeting you: Thanks for meeting me today. What if anything, was your deciding factor to say yes? I had a sales rep ask this exact question to a prospect after an enormous amount of energy went into securing this meeting. The prospects response and how the rep handled it were both priceless. The prospect answered: “I said yes to this meeting simply, so you’d stop calling me and leave me alone.” The reps reply: “That’s great, I always have a hard time letting go of someone that I think I can truly help. You happen to be one of those people and I can’t wait for us to get to know each other enough that you see that my intention is to help you.” Then she asked: is there anyone else you would like to invite into this meeting, so I don’t have to bother you again?” (she said this part very jokingly, and the prospect relaxed almost immediately)

Don’t forget to control your body language – People sometimes forget that almost 70% of our communication is non-verbal. Our body language tells people a lot, our appearance tells people a lot, and our facial expressions tell people a lot. Learn to master all three of these, and you can accomplish just about anything. Your facial expressions and body language both can betray you. You can say one thing and communicate a completely different message. So, learn what idiosyncrasies you have, what posture you carry naturally, and what you look like when you communicate with people. Your personal ticks can go unnoticed by friends and family due to overexposure so ask colleagues or supervisors for help, a mentor would come in very handy here. Most importantly learn to have an open and welcoming posture and be non-threatening when you speak and if nothing else make sure you at least look the part...look presentable and dress for success!

Don’t forget to lose the mystery – Rapport building is not the business of asking a bunch of questions, getting people to answer and hope they like you. Nope, it’s a conversation...you will need to answer some questions too. Make sure you answer them as quickly and honestly as possible before moving on to the actual business at hand. Don’t be afraid to be a bit open and vulnerable but be careful not to overshare personal information. Most importantly, if you don’t know an answer never, never, ever make something up!!! Being honest and telling a client or prospect you don’t have an answer can quickly gain you credibility in the rapport building process that continues beyond your initial conversation. You are not expected to know everything...no one is, so to lie is to die in the sales world.

Don’t forget to never talk down to people – You may be the expert in the room on a particular topic, but never forget that education can come in many forms and from many directions. Being a bit humble in an environment that you could be viewed as a leading authority can lead to great rapport. When people feel that figures of authority value their opinion, they then feel like they matter. Remember, everyone matters in one facet or another, never discount anyone and your job becomes easier. If you can make people feel like they matter, rapport building is easy!

Lastly, Don’t forget to never give up – Rapport is not something that ends when you get the sale. Building and rebuilding rapport happens for as long as you want to be in sales. Whether you bump into an old client 2 years or 10 years from now, they’ll remember how you cared to build the relationship and will respond to you accordingly. Imagine, you’re eating lunch with a prospective client and a client from an old job sees you...how would you like that interaction to go? How eager would you be to introduce your new prospect to an old client, regardless if you’re in the same industry or not? I try to make it a point to never put myself in a situation to not want to make that introduction.



In final thought, rapport is important in every stage of the sales process, not just the beginning. Keep using your rapport to deepen your relationships with people in general not just prospects and the rewards are endless. Keep working on perfecting the art of rapport building and keep selling!!!