



Lynda
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Rapport – can it be too much of a good thing?

I've seen rapport described as 'trust + responsiveness', though this is primarily amongst NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) practitioners. One dictionary definition says rapport is 'sympathetic relationship or understanding'. However, I believe good relationships develop over time and that rapport is an important part of building a good relationship.

Establishing rapport starts with a genuine interest and curiosity about the other person, along with mutual respect and trust. It doesn't always mean collaboration or co-operation, and it certainly isn't about capitulation or acquiescence.

Rather, good rapport implies a willingness to stand in someone else's shoes; when present, we experience being 'in sync' with another person. It may be that you have intangible things in common, like values and aspirations. Or you may share a similar educational background, accomplishments or interests. Perhaps your children attend the same school. Or you might admire the other person, need to work with them, or that you would love them as a client.

across as a kind of 'chemistry' that's hard to describe, but is obvious. Can you recall a time when you witnessed an impressive pitch? You probably experienced a higher than average appearance of strong rapport between the members of the team. It's often what makes the difference between a good pitch and an outstanding one.

However, it is still about communication, connection even, between individuals. Some of these will be people you work with on a short-term basis such as in a pitch situation or a software development team. In other situations, deeper connections and relationships will need to be created and built, such as with those people you work with on a daily basis. In essence, rapport is one of the foundations of a solid relationship.



All Blacks, a team that it was harder to get out of once you'd been selected!

Evidence of rapport between members of a pitch team (or for that matter, on a playing field!) can be impressive. It comes

A word of caution! There are some personality or behavioural types that have little or no time for 'rapport' and we all know a few of those.

If you are one of those people (the 'director/driver' type) please bear in mind that many people you interact with

will be put off if you appear to have no empathy, are uninterested in seeing their point of view or knowing anything about them personally.

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Grant Pearson Brown
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The Presentation &
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Alastairwell, he objects. To lots of things, and gives advice and tips on how to manage those of others.

Rapport – can it be too much of a good thing?... continued

All of us have to deal with a variety of personalities in our business life, whether colleagues, superiors, subordinates, suppliers or clients. There'll be times when others won't always want to adapt to you, so the ability to build rapport – quite quickly sometimes - is a useful social skill to learn.

Looking at it from the point of view of a director/driver, it's important to be able to interact with them without making what they consider irrelevant 'small talk' sometimes. This is unlikely to be personal! It is simply their style of behaviour to dispense with the niceties and get on with the business in hand.

Of course, there are many aspects at play with respect to who sets the tone and who follows. However, this is not always about hierarchies. Life is not that simple. This isn't about repeatedly subjugating your personality to someone else's.

It's about reading each situation and judging the best action to take at any particular time. Otherwise, there's a danger of getting stuck in often outmoded patterns of behaviour.



Balance involvement with independence

Balancing involvement with independence through our use of language is important. The ability to convey collaboration rather than antagonism and competition is something I alluded to in my article on Conversational styles (SpeakUp! No. 45).

Establishing boundaries is also key, and particularly so in a longstanding client relationship where a kind of intimacy has been developed. This doesn't mean, necessarily, that you are friends

(although you may be that too) and there are times when the sharing of something particularly personal might cause embarrassment or pain for either or both parties. If you have a really good rapport, you'll make the judgement that it isn't appropriate to share that information at this time.

In case you think your rapport building needs a little work, below are five tips to try:-

1. **Turn up the volume on your senses.**

Experiment with this in the mornings on your journey to work. This will increase your awareness of others and your surroundings. Choose a sense at a time, e.g. close your eyes and listen, or block your ears to see your eyes more.

2. The NLP tool of **mirroring and matching** someone's body language can be very useful, though be careful not to use this without empathy – it can come across as insincere.

3. **Pay attention and listen actively.**

Sometimes more than an 'uh huh' or a nod is required. Give candid feedback but take care not to interrupt; it can seem inconsiderate.

4. **Be curious.** Ask questions and listen to the answers. You might try this with someone in your office who you know very little about.

5. **Commit what you learn about a person to memory.** If you can't do that, do what Onassis did - keep pertinent notes on anyone who is important to you in business. It clearly worked for him, and however contrived it might seem, it showed how much he cared.

Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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Carney's first go: Forward misguidance?



I was once asked by a host at a dinner to keep my speech short, as it was expected, and it was just before we ate. I simply said "Thank you". This got a rapturous round of applause, several slaps on the back, and we all sat down to eat in a jolly mood. Probably my easiest speech, if a bit daring. It would seem that Mark Carney, got a similar initial response, although he spoke for somewhat longer than I did when he gave his first big speech. So, did he get it right?

Mark Carney, a Canadian, and formerly the Governor of the Bank of Canada, had a 'good recession'. He led his country through that turmoil and came out this end with his reputation enhanced. He was snaffled away to be our Central Bank Governor. He took over at the Bank of England (BoE) on 2nd July 2013.

Everyone gets a little time to settle in, although he seemed to be making his mark (excuse the pun) before he even got here, with lots of UK press coverage telling us what he would do and say. He managed despite that to stay pretty enigmatic until well after starting. He gave his first press conference on Day One, after arriving unsportingly early, and unconventionally by 'tube' (London's underground trains). He made his first big policy announcement on 7th August, but waited until 28th August to give his first keynote address. And he did so in the rather unusual setting of a business conference in Nottingham. Clearly he's a comfortable traveller.



Mark Carney kicks off his speaking role as the new BoE Governor

His aim at this conference was to reconfirm and re-emphasise his clear 'forward guidance' from 7th August on when we should expect him and his colleagues on the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to raise Base Rates.

The UK Base Rate has been set at the historically record low of 0.5% since 5th March 2009, also therefore an

unprecedented period of very low rates. If you believe the initial reaction on 7th August from the "teenage scribblers" as Nigel Lawson once called them (aka The Press), he seemed to have done a very good job. The TV, Radio, and Press coverage all complimented him on his speaking style - his pitch, fluency and pacing. They commented that he spoke with great clarity, brevity and simplicity of message, perhaps for the first time for a Governor.

Put simply his message was, with caveats, that **"we won't consider raising Base Rates until UK unemployment falls to 7%."** He went further, stating that this was unlikely to happen until well into 2016.

The media also complimented his confident and persuasive delivery. For example The Daily Telegraph the following morning carried the caption that he had used *"...his first speech as governor to convince sceptics of his pledge to keep interest rates at a record low for the next three years"*. He had set out a clear and sensible set of parameters that would give the BoE's view on interest rates for some time forwards. Implication: All we would need to do is watch unemployment rates.

But then the picture changed. The persuasion went into reverse. The devil was in the caveats, which together meant that the BoE could change rates pretty much any time they wanted. The Fourth Estate (another euphemism for The Press) oversimplified the detail, claiming that Carney would probably raise rates sooner, and the "markets" reacted by also believing that rates would rise sooner than Carney said, and immediately put their own interest rates up.

This was precisely what Carney had aimed to avoid.

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Carney's first go: Forward mis-guidance? ...continued

Kathleen Brooks of Forex.com commented on 7th August: *'Is Carney a banker or a lawyer? He couched the announcement on forward guidance with an economic threshold with so many escape clauses it sounded more like he was reading a disclaimer...'*

That is why Carney had to come out again three weeks later, and use some of his colleagues too, to restate the original key message that Base Rates would stay low for a further 3 years. But it was too late, the damage had been done and since then rates have remained stubbornly elevated with a forecast first increase in Base Rates for late 2015. Sterling has been stronger too.

It is worth restating Carney's Caveats. He first generalised that the MPC members *"do not intend to raise the base rate at least until the unemployment rate falls to 7%, provided there are no material threats to either price or financial stability"*

He later defined his caveats:

1. *Price stability - if there are signs of inflation rising, specifically 2.5% or more 18-24 months ahead.* He gave this a 40% probability!
2. *"Medium term inflation expectations are not well anchored".* The vagueness of this clause has left people spinning with its comparative lack of precision.

In combination, it is easy to see why observers did not find his position on Base Rates tenable. The second caveat would not have become a problem if the first had seemed unlikely, but with the first so likely, the assumption is that the second caveat is too, and therefore the commitment does not hold.

So what can we learn from this study?

First that the key damage was done by the use of heavy caveats. The % chance given was too high, with the result that they completely undermined his key message with a big hole below the water line. We've all heard the phrase *"terms and conditions apply"*, with cynicism.

I am quite sure that Carney meant to say what he said, that his % was right, and that the caveats are very important, but their combined effect was devastating. So the first message to you is this: **Don't use them unless you are sure you can control their effect.**

My second message is that if you use such caveats, **make sure they do not take precedence over the key messages.** They have to be in the background. The context is very important as a signal of their probability.

Strangely, if Carney had left them undefined as per the bold/italics quote above, observers might have accepted their subordinate position, although there would then have been several complaints about their vagueness.

The key thing with any get-out clauses is that they should not actually appear to be get-out clauses!



Carney relaxes at a music concert near Oxford after a tough day at the office.

Their probability or likelihood must be perceived as unlikely for the key tenet of your message to hold firm.

There is another way to look at this though, the opposite way: If you want to seem definite about a course of action, but in reality want to give yourself a great deal of optionality, then stick in some caveats. Keep them a bit vague, or in a state where they are immeasurable.

There you go, "Bob's your Uncle", a well known phrase, and I think it means 'job done', via some Cockney Rhyming Slang, as in Uncle Bob = Job.

Ewan Pearson

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I object!



We handle objections all the time both at work and at home. But how skilled are we at handling them and does it matter anyway? In a business setting with a prospect it could be a pivotal point.

Objections may be just a way for the prospect client to test you; at least it shows an interest is being taken. Of course an objection may be one you have heard many times before and have no difficulty in handling.

But the curved ball may be thrown you at a key moment; so you need to know what to do.



Everyone/thing is entitled to object

Preparation. A cunning move is to anticipate what might be coming up. Think how you might answer and then rehearse the objection and response out loud.

This might sound excessive but we know that when the ball is then thrown you will answer with more confidence and the words will come more easily to your brain and mouth. Equally your body language will give less away in terms of surprise and uncertainty.

Don't Counter. Up comes the objection and your instinct is to give an immediate response to deal with it. But a better technique is reply with a clarifying question. For example: *"I am most annoyed with your service....etc"*. And you reply with a question. *"Tell me more - what exactly is the issue you are unhappy about?"* This has two effects: 1. They have to create more information which may put them under pressure,

2. They may give you detail that enables you to respond better. You have more thinking time.

Rationalise: Why are they objecting? They may have a genuine concern but sometimes objections are flung across the room to impress others in the audience, or you. Maybe they are natural objectors on principle. If you can spot this then you are better equipped to answer.

Respond: Ok, it's time to respond. Try to give an honest and spin-free answer. To prevaricate only annoys and reduces trust, not that you should weaken your position or say something that you might regret. It maybe you have to stall by saying you will get back by a specified time.

Close off: Finally confirm with them that you have handled their objection to their satisfaction. If they say yes then good news. But if you didn't have the courage to ask for closure, then maybe they went away unsatisfied, even though you thought you had it sorted. The act of inviting a response forces them to make a decision. They may not agree. If so, you have a choice: Go back over the ground again and seek further clarification about their objection, or agree to disagree.

Follow up: You may find their objection is now on a different basis. In the end there may still be disagreement. You can then summarise what the perception is for both parties and maybe a plan as to how this might be resolved.

At the end whether there is agreement or not, a follow-up email summarising what was said gives you and them a record of the event rather than relying on subjective memory.

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Alastair Grant

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I object!continued

Our Services

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We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific Voice, Visual and Content Analysis reports, then provide content, voice coaching and non verbal communications advice.

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Emotion. The rather clinical approach described above may not be enough. The other party is upset or plain angry. Here you have to manage this with a degree of empathy.

They object and you answer along the lines of: *"I understand how you feel"*. If that sounds insincere that it might be: *"I can see you are upset/unhappy/concerned/passionate/irritated by this"*. Here you are tapping into their emotional state.

Mirror and Match. If they are talking rapidly then match their pace rather than using a slow or soothing delivery. The latter would smack of patronisation or worse still, sexism. UK Prime Minister David Cameron is probably still smarting from the flak he received when he invited female MP Angela Eagle to *'Calm down dear'* (But in the rough and tumble of a raucous Commons debate worse has happened).



David Cameron does not manage to appease Angela Eagle

Third Party. Bring in others, for example: *"I understand this is an issue for you – indeed you are not alone. A few others have had similar concerns"*. Here you are legitimising their point but you then go on to say: *"But when we explained why we were acting in this way they understood and agreed our point."*

This view of a third party helps to give you more street cred or authority. Of course it must be truthful.

Seek Allies. It may be possible that their objection can be overcome by involving an ally who confirms your version of events. This must not be seen as an attempt to gang up on the objector. It's better if the ally is seen as a neutral person and not your buddy.

Listening skills. Beyond clarifying the objection, being able to demonstrate your listening skills helps to build rapport. Not just the words you use but by looking at them with undivided attention, not glancing down e.g. at your smart phone, but nodding to encourage them to speak. Finally, that your voice registers genuine concern.

There is no magic wand for dealing with objections particularly if they are fully justified and the other party is fired up, but you do have tactics and the tools above to deploy.

These can put you on top or at least mitigate an unfavourable situation.

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