

Matching and Mirroring **Building Rapport**

My definition of rapport is *“the ability to connect with others in a way that creates a climate of trust and understanding.”*

Being in rapport with someone is a prerequisite for any coaching conversation and, indeed, I could go further and say, for any type of interaction where you are hoping to persuade or influence another person.

Rapport is a relationship of mutual trust and understanding. Rapport starts with an honest attempt to understand the other person, to gain a genuine appreciation of how it is to be them and to respect their experience. To be in rapport we don't have to agree with the other person, in fact it is perfectly possible to have rapport and strongly disagree. Rapport fosters trust and respect and supports authentic communication. Without rapport you are unlikely to have any meaningful or positively orientated dialogue.

We can demonstrate respect for the other person in lots of different ways; by maintaining a state of curiosity, being non-judgemental, and being genuinely interested in who they are, their beliefs and values and how they choose to behave.

One of the ways we can demonstrate respect is by matching someone else's behaviour. People generally like people who are like them. When people have a good relationship and are in rapport they will tend to match and mirror each other.

Matching and mirroring are very similar, there isn't any difference in the effect. It is simply if you are matching someone and they raise their right hand, you would raise your right hand; if you were mirroring them and they raised their right hand, you'd raise your left hand – as if you were the mirror image of them.

You might have noticed with people you feel really comfortable with that you tend to match and mirror the following:

- Physiology – posture, stance, gestures, facial expressions, breathing
- Voice Tonality – pitch, speed, rhythm, volume, softness / harshness, clarity, intonation
- Words - sensory preferences; visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, vocabulary, key words
- Other - shared & similar experiences, shared interests, universal experiences, level of detail.

When we are wanting to build more rapport, particularly at the start of a coaching conversation, it can be useful to intentionally match and mirror an aspect of the other person. I'd advise against mimicking someone, instead pick something subtle and notice how the more you are paying attention to them, the more comfortable you both feel in the conversation.