

8 Keys To Establishing Rapport

Whether on the phone or in person, establishing rapport is one of the most important things a salesperson can do. It's an overused word, so let's take a look at what it actually means: a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well (from Wikipedia). The final two words are the most important: *communicate well*. In order to establish a level of communication that will allow you to understand their needs, you will require a degree of harmony between you. You will need to know where you can tread, and what's important to them. Ultimately, you will need to establish something resembling a friendship which may, given time, even evolve into one.

1. Take the time to build rapport

It doesn't matter how busy you are, or even how busy you perceive your prospect to be; time spent in building rapport is time spent well. This does not mean you should spend the entire time chatting. Rather, you should allocate a reasonable amount of time in each meeting or call to ensure you're on the same wavelength.

2. Politeness and friendliness go far

These most basic of skills should be a part of every single conversation you ever have. Politeness is the opener of doors, and friendliness ensures they stay open. Avoid overplaying the politeness or friendliness as these can indicate hidden, underhanded, or nefarious intentions.

3. Mirroring

This is one of the simplest techniques to establish rapport, and should be so unconscious it appears natural. Practice will thus be necessary. It should never be done directly, as this can indicate mockery. If you're in a meeting, match their posture and body language; if in a call, their tone of voice and speed of speech. Done well, they will open up to you, and you will be able to gauge their emotional state effectively.

4. Provide up-front value

Provide value unasked. Offer advice or guidance where you, as a domain expert, feel it is necessary. Do so delicately and make sure it'll be well-received first. This will increase the prospect's trust in you, and may lead to a sense of obligation on their part. This can be useful later; just be careful not to abuse it as that can sour the relationship.

Ask for a small, insignificant favor. This will also increase trust, and will lead to a better relationship.

5. Find common ground

Build trust and camaraderie by actively seeking something common to you both. It doesn't matter whether it's something you like or dislike; as long as you share the same feeling or emotion about it, your trust in each other will naturally increase. Shared interests are particularly useful here, and can sometimes be found on social networks. If you can't find any, go to the next section.

6. Show genuine interest

People may be poor judges of character, but they're remarkably good at figuring out when your interest is genuine or not. Since people like speaking about themselves, one of the best ways is to let them. Just make sure your interest is genuine. This will give you much room to find common ground.

Likewise, be honest with your compliments and don't overdo it. You want to be genuine, not obsequious.

7. Be yourself

Many salespeople take their hints from the movies, attempt to emulate those styles, and then wonder why they don't sell. Rather than trying to create an artificial persona, analyze yourself, find the traits you think are most suited to a sales role, and fortify those. You'll come across as a human being (and not some sales drone) and you'll be able to establish rapport more easily.

8. Don't appear desperate

Even if it's your last chance to make the month, and even if it's your only chance, don't appear desperate. Your need for a deal is not the prospect's problem, and shouldn't be their concern. Rather, you want to focus on understanding their needs and building rapport. Always be cool, calm, and collected.