

## Six ways to build rapport and break the ice.

Attempting to build rapport can feel intimidating, especially if you aren't someone who loves small talk. But part of building rapport is playing to your strengths and using your personality to forge a true connection.

### 1. First, understand yourself

The first thing to do, before you even begin a conversation, is to focus on yourself. Building rapport isn't about faking it. You don't have to be the most outgoing or extroverted person to build this skill. Anyone can build rapport, regardless of your communication skills.

By identifying your strengths and weaknesses, you can effectively use them during future conversations. For example, say you don't think you're very good at small talk. That's okay! Instead of engaging in small talk, try to engage new acquaintances with deeper conversations. Ask them about their pets, or their work history. These are still simple questions, but they go beyond the surface and help you begin to understand your team members on a deeper level. Alternatively, if you're introverted, you might get tired at networking events or crowded situations. That's fine, too. Prioritise 1:1s, coffee conversations, or even short watercooler chats with an individual. Lean into your strengths instead of forcing yourself to attend networking event after networking event.

### 2. Practice active listening

Listening plays a key role in building rapport. Active listening, or listening to understand, is the practice of focusing on what the other person is saying—instead of thinking about what you're going to say next.

Active listening is a great way to build meaningful connections and invest in deeper conversations. When you're paying full attention to the other person, instead of thinking about your own thoughts, you're more invested in what they have to say. Listening helps you understand them better and makes them feel more comfortable and heard around you.

### 3. Use positive body language

Almost equally important to how you listen is how you look while you're listening. Even if you're paying attention, distracted, or disinterested nonverbal

communication can unintentionally put people off. During a conversation, check in with your facial expressions and body language. Are your arms crossed? Are you making eye contact? These small things make a big difference.

Make sure to:

- Nod along.
- Make encouraging sounds and gestures.
- Smile.
- Make eye contact.

#### 4. Look for commonalities

One of the easiest ways to build rapport is to look for similarities between you and someone else. Do you have any shared interests? A similar past?

Oftentimes, it's much easier to forge a connection with someone when you have something in common. You can use that common ground as a jumping-off point for a deeper conversation.

You can often do this by paying attention to the other person. For example, you might notice a coworker wearing a sweatshirt from their college or displaying a picture of their kids on their desk. Maybe you heard they have a similar work history to you, or you both love cats. Find something in common with that person to build a deeper connection.

#### 5. Grow your empathy

Even if you don't have a lot in common with the other person, use empathy and curiosity to build rapport. Part of this is focusing on the other person's needs, and how you can help them.

For example, is the other person new to the office? Maybe they need a friend. Did they have a bad day at work? Ask them if they want to grab coffee and chat, if you think that would help. Remember, building rapport is about making a connection with another person, and you can do this effectively by tapping into your emotional intelligence.

#### 6. Ask open-ended questions

If you can't find anything in common, use open-ended questions to allow the other person to share their passions. Open-ended questions prompt the other person to share more about their past. You can use open-ended questions for

any topic. For example, instead of asking “How long have you been working in marketing?”, which has a one-sentence answer, try “How did you get started with marketing?” You’re asking about the same thing but prompting the person to share more about their past.

### How to build rapport in 4 steps

Building rapport goes beyond using specific techniques; it’s about applying higher-level concepts that strengthen your interpersonal skills in both personal and professional settings.

Let’s explore the broader principles that will help you form and maintain meaningful connections over time.

#### Step 1: Build trust to establish rapport.

At the core of any successful relationship is mutual trust. You can build trust by demonstrating self-awareness—understanding how your words and actions affect others and adjusting them as needed.

This reliability helps foster good rapport in both your personal life and professional interactions, where trust is often the key to establishing meaningful connections.

#### Step 2: Use emotional intelligence to understand others.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is your ability to recognize and respond to emotions, both in yourself and others. It requires you to pay attention not just to words but also to non-verbal cues like tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language.

By doing this, you demonstrate strong interpersonal skills that allow you to build deeper connections. A high level of EI will help you manage challenging relationships and find ways to connect, even with difficult personalities.

#### Step 3: Adapt your approach to fit different situations.

Adapting your communication style based on the situation is key to building rapport across a variety of contexts. In both professional and personal life, you’ll encounter different types of people. Flexibility shows that you’re attuned to their unique point of view.

For instance, the way you build rapport with colleagues might be different than how you establish it with friends or family, but the underlying principle of flexibility remains.

#### Step 4: Show consistency to maintain rapport over time.

Consistency is essential in building lasting rapport. Regular interactions, whether it's a casual check-in or following up on a task, help reinforce the trust you've built.

For professionals, staying engaged with colleagues on LinkedIn or networking for referrals are ways to maintain and deepen relationships over time.

In your personal life, consistency shows people you value the relationship. This makes building good work-life relationships easier.

#### Rapport building examples

Here's a practical example of how to build rapport with a difficult colleague or boss, broken down into actionable steps.

You've started working with a colleague who is known for being difficult to approach. In your first meeting, they seem disengaged, making little eye contact and coming across as frustrated.

1. **Stay self-aware.** Notice their body language and adjust your own reactions to stay open and calm.
2. **Pay attention to nonverbal cues.** Focus on their tone of voice, facial expressions, and mannerisms. Use positive non-verbal communication to show you're listening.
3. **Ask open-ended questions.** Show genuine curiosity by asking questions that help you understand their point of view and concerns.
4. **Find common ground.** Look for shared interests or goals to create a connection and soften their defensiveness.
5. **Be consistent.** Follow through on your commitments to build mutual trust over time.

By applying these steps, you'll gradually improve the working relationship and create a more collaborative environment.

Build great rapport to develop meaningful working relationships.

Good rapport improves your working relationships and makes you a better communicator. But like most soft skills, building rapport is an ongoing process. Think of this less like a skill to check off a list and more like a set of mannerisms and practices you can build over time.