

How to gain respect and make a positive lasting impression

Presence, and how to cultivate it
Allow the real you to shine through
The 20 secrets of building rapport
Use your body language to send the right signals

Watch the successful connector talking easily to those around them. They appear to instinctively know how to handle themselves and their interaction with others, and you can almost feel the respect they command. But how do they do it, and what makes them so attractive?

The top connectors have figured out what works, and what doesn't when dealing with people. They know that every word they say and every move they make sends a subliminal – but immensely powerful – message about them. Just as David Attenborough and his other cohorts have analysed the behaviour patterns of animals, so too have Dr Desmond Morris, Alan Pease and others for the human species. You'll find their key discoveries sprinkled liberally throughout this section.

Your relationships are fundamental to your success, and since most successful people have built strong and lasting relationships with their network of key contacts, there must be some correlation between their ability to get on with people and their success.

Put simply, if you have the ability to generate rapport with others you'll be happy and successful, if you don't, you won't. Without rapport in your networking, you'll just be going through the motions and meeting lots of people who don't particularly feel an affinity with you. That's not an effective networking (or life) strategy.

Research by psychology and body language experts has shown that many successful people have the natural ability to get people to like and appreciate them very quickly. They make people feel comfortable and safe around them and show an interest in their perspective. Their whole demeanour makes them attract people like a magnet. They have 'presence'.

You develop presence when you have the right posture, attitude and body language. Those with it exude positive energy, look alive and interested. They command space by their confident and self assured approach. But presence is more than just these things. You can 'feel' someone's presence in their voice too.

Let's focus on enhancing the 'essential you' and developing your presence 'rating' before we move onto the next link in the chain for connectors, creating rapport.

'Presence' – have you got it?

We'd all love to have that almost mystical power of 'presence' and I'll show you here that you can develop more of it if you are willing to work at it. But don't confuse it with 'charisma'. A person with charisma has achieved a special way of being that seems to permeate both him and the room. Some lucky folk are born with it, but for others, their life achievements and tribulations help to create it. Presence, on the other hand, is all about space and how you use it. To explain...

In practice

In her seminars, confidence guru Mary-Beth Bunch asks delegates; "How much space are you occupying just now?" The vast majority reply with something like 'Just around my chair'. 'A direct line to you' or 'As far as the person sitting next to me'. She then asks them to assess the amount of space she is occupying. The usual response is "The whole room".

'How do you know?' she will say, and the answers include 'Something about your posture,' 'You are standing and we are sitting,' 'You are in charge of this seminar.' The delegates know when someone is commanding space, yet can't quite put their finger on the specific reasons why.

Your own personal space is an invisible energy field you create around yourself, and if those around you can sense it, it must be more than just imagination. The obvious indicators of your 'presence rating' are your posture, energy, eyes, voice and smile. But there's more; factors such as your attitude, thoughts and imagination also have a big say in your overall 'presence' and, by putting each of your presence ingredients under the microscope we can identify ways you can develop more of it. Here's secret number one:

Take posture lessons from cats

Your posture can make or break your ability to have presence. Get it right and it helps you to look energetic, adds to your voice quality and forges the kind of image you want to project. Remember though that your posture is dynamic, not static. Instead of something rigid or fixed, think of yourself as being as mobile as a cat. Just this thought alone will help you to develop the right feeling of movement and power. Connectors with this kind of energy have sparkling eyes, look vibrant and absolutely appear to be a person you would want to know better.

In practice

In a study of 10,000 people by UCLA, each respondent was asked their initial impressions of someone they later bought something from. The results may blow your mind! 7% said the person had a good knowledge of their product, service or topic. 38% said the person had good voice quality and they sounded intelligent, confident and interested. But here's the shocker ... 55% said it was the way the person walked! They had an air of confidence and self-assurance, even before they said a word. How about that for the power of body language!

If the way you hold yourself can make an impact on the most tangible of measures, sales figures, you can bet that there is really something in it. The problem is that we've been standing, sitting and moving the way we have for years. How do we improve? The answer is gradually – but it's worth the wait.

Proponents of posture enhancing disciplines like Pilates and the Alexander technique can tell amazing stories of the difference they have made to the well being of themselves and their pupils by the use of correct posture. Not just physical enhancements, but mental and spiritual onestoo. Could posture be *the* key determinant of presence? Looking at those who take the Pilates and Alexander principles to heart I would say that they are not far wrong. But before you join up for the next course...

Try this

Posture, standing taller

Face a mirror and put the palm of your hand just above the crown (towards the back) of your head. Looking straight ahead and keeping loose, stretch upwards with your crown to touch your hand. If you've done it right you'll feel quite tall, the back of your neck will be stretched and feel long. If you mistakenly place your hand at the very top and centre of your head and stretch your chin will rise. This is not what you want.

After doing this a few times, just placing your hand over the crown will remind you to stand taller. Do it at any time when you are standing or sitting. As a reminder to stand tall, place post-it notes on your mirrors, your desk and by your phone where they will act as a reminder. See and feel the difference in a week

So back to those key tips for developing presence...

Are you using your eyes to just look ... or really see?

Few personal attributes are more attractive than shining, sparkling and alive eyes. They are the 'window to your soul' and an indisputable guide to your interest in what's going on. Eyes have been used by doctors to diagnose illness centuries, and they are giving away what you are thinking right now.

Watch someone who is self-conscious; no doubt their eyes are not really focused on what's going on. They are preoccupied or self-conscious. When you are 'self-centered' in this way you prevent yourself from being fully present ... and it shows most in your eyes. What you need to do to develop presence is to release the self-centered eyes by using 'peripheral vision'.

Try this

Peripheral vision involves using a broad scope of seeing and involves using 180-degree vision. Most of us are physically capable of achieving nearly 180-degrees of vision. You can test this for yourself by extending your arms to the front with your hands touching. While looking straight ahead, move your arms slowly apart, keeping them at shoulder level. Note the point when you can no longer see both hands. It is probably close to 180 degrees.

Without moving your head you can see the ceiling, the floor, everything within the 180 degrees in detail. You are seeing the context of the whole. When you look at another person this way, you see that the person and most of the adjustment surroundings at the same time. This is very different to intensely glaring into their eyes and being unaware of what else may be in your space. Instead, you are visually aware of the whole scene and your eyes have a softer, less aggressive look.

How you 'see' people is vital to the way you are perceived by them, and is an indication of the way manage your personal space. When you use a wide peripheral vision to see another person they know they have been seen and you have given them a very strong form of acknowledgement. No one likes to feel ignored. Having 'tunnel' vision when around people, whether it is simply a bad habit or deliberate, is usually interpreted as being cold, aloof and uncaring. Everyone needs acknowledgement, and the simple gesture of 'seeing' them is the easiest way to show it.

We have contact!

The social scientists have proved that strong eye contact gives you the impression of being an intelligent and abstract thinker, and that exaggerated eye contact can be advantageous to a connector if used carefully.

Recent research done in the United States asked people to have a casual conversation with a member of the opposite sex for two minutes. Unbeknown to the female participants, half of the male subjects were briefed in advance to have intense eye contact with their female conversation partner, and they were told to do this by simply counting the number of times their partner blinked during the conversation. The remainder of the males were told to do nothing different to what they would normally do.

Questioned later, the unsuspecting female blinkers reported significantly higher feelings of respect and fondness for those men who had simply been counting their blinks than the control group who talked normally. Why? Because the blink counters appeared to be more interested in what the ladies were saying, and demonstrated it with their body language and attention.

In practice

There are different approaches to eye contact depending on the networking situation you find yourself in.

Imagine an inverted triangle in your face, the base of it just above your eyes and the other two sides emanate from it and come to a point between your nose and your lips. This is the area to focus on for business conversations.

In convivial social situations, the point of the triangle drops to include the chin and neck areas. The triangle is a good eye contact to let you gaze in the vicinity of the face but ensure that you won't fixate on someone's eyes non-stop. One helpful hint here is to look at one eye then both then one eye again rather than stare into their eyes.

Social studies suggest that looking at people's 'eye area' for about 80-90% of the time you converse is the right amount. Any less and you fail to make the full impact of your connection, and any longer and you may be considered as being too aggressive and direct.

If you want people to like you and gain empathy with them use the 80% guide. Naturally you'll be looking at your contact when you introduce yourself, shake hands and start speaking. Equally important for cementing the relationship is holding direct eye contact when you are saying your goodbyes. It leaves your conversation partner with a strong and lasting message that you enjoyed speaking with them.

I love it here...

You've seen people who just don't want to be where they are right now. They look either distinctly uncomfortable (like when they've got a speech to make and they would rather be ANYWHERE than in front of

all those people) or bored - and it shows in their disinterested body language, the glances to other parts of the room or the glazed look in their eyes. We've all done it, so don't pretend you don't know the feeling.

Contrast that with the positive alertness, interest and, yes, excitement you show when you are in situations you really enjoy and with people you really like. Capture that feeling in your mind's eye. That's the look and demeanour of someone with presence - they want to be EXACTLY WHERE THEY ARE. Right now they would prefer to be in no other place than talking to you. Doesn't that make you feel good? Wanting to be there is a prerequisite of presence.

Try this

'Long time no see'

Think of the new contact you next meet as an old friend who you used to know fantastically well when you were younger but have lost touch over the years. Now the occasion has brought you together again. Close your eyes and feel the sensation for a minute. What changes do you feel in your body, your face, your general attitude to the situation. You'll find that your face softens, your body language opens up and you are generally much more responsive to having a great conversation – what's more you're got that feeling that life is good, you're eager to find out more about the other person and to share experiences.

The exercise is one that can be an attitude changing experience for some people, it and can have a tremendous impact on how they view their conversations with strangers. They literally visualise the person in front of them as a 'long time no see' friend and the visualisation helps them to come over as much warmer than previously. Don't worry, you won't go 'over the top' and treat them as a genuine long lost friend but, who knows, your openness might be a start of a mutually beneficial friendship or business relationship!

Just as a reverse experiment, try picturing the person you met as someone who used to bully you at school, or make fun of you in some way, what does your body language and attitude tell you about your likely success in building rapport with this person?

Up your voice tempo, and use all the notes

Without a doubt your voice is the carrier of your presence, energy, feelings, enthusiasm and imagination, and your accent tells the unspoken story of your roots.

But why can some people come over as fascinating and intelligent individuals who you can listen to all day long, and others sound as dull as dishwater? The secret is one that actors are particularly familiar with. Self-awareness is part of the answer, as is the ability to let yourself go and leave your inhibitions behind. It comes down to this:

To give their voice more variety, and sound more interesting, many people have to go over the top by a huge amount. It's one of the first things budding performers learn, and only really believe it when they see or hear themselves, on video for example.

Only when they see and hear it for themselves, do they recognise the need to give their conversations and presentation more 'oomph'. At first, going 'over the top' means taking what seems like a huge risk, and this is where a bit of courage is needed. Surprisingly, most people find that it's really hard to exaggerate too much!

Here's a way that Mary-Beth Bunch, the confidence-boosting guru uses to help her students to work on their expressiveness.

Try this

Choose a children's story to read aloud and let yourself become completely involved in the story. If you feel embarrassed, close the door. Give yourself permission to be a fool or a clown momentarily. Read the story three times, each time a little differently.

1. Read two or three minutes of the text in the way you might read to children and record yourself on video or tape recorder.

2. Read another two or three minutes of text but this time give each of the characters an appropriate voice i.e. a bear or lion voice, or a little girl or boy voice, etc. when no characters have dialogue, chose important or colourful words to emphasise.
3. Next read and act out the text at the same time. Pretend your audience is deaf and you must show them the story. This means that if the text reads 'they walked down a very long road', demonstrate this with your hand at the same time by 'walking' with your fingers. You will feel much like a small childrens' entertainer, but keep going! While you are busy carrying out this ridiculous exercise, your voice will be gaining colour, giving each word it's true meaning, and your pace will fit with the text rather than having the same pitch and rhythm throughout.
4. Now find a company report or newspaper and read this in the same way as you did the final version of the children's story. But beware of reverting to type. The words can be just as colourful in your report or news clipping reading as it was for the story.

This exercise builds on the very things you'll need most in developing your verbal presence. With practice you'll develop a fresh approach to your delivery with a spontaneous rhythm and sensitivity to the words, the right pace and pauses, and add to the range and colour of your voice. You'll have the gravitas and energy 'on tap' whenever you want it.

So, you've established your presence, next you need to build some rapport with those important to you.

How to build rapport

Leaders in all walks of life recognise that other people are the most valuable resource they have. Charismatic leaders who demonstrate that they understand their people and their needs are often idolised by their followers, who see that the leader has their interests at heart. And that's where one of Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People introduces itself.

"First seek to understand, then to be understood" he says, powerfully demonstrating that to be effective (in this case an effective networker) it is a pre-requisite to gain information, to see things from your contact's point of view and to appreciate them and their situation before launching into what's important to you.

How you build rapport is easy once you know how. But, before we get into the 'nitty gritty' let's take a look at the two types of rapport we all need to create.

The first, 'instant rapport', is the type of feeling you get when you meet someone for the first time. At its extreme this is 'love at first sight', an overpowering mutual feeling that this person is your soul mate, and understands you completely. Less passionate, but equally heart-warming, is the feeling you get when you meet someone who you 'hit it off' with immediately:

The second type of rapport is long term - like lifelong friends, buddies who you only see now and again but can pick up where you left off just as soon as you speak to them. It's based on mutual respect and trust, sincerity, shared experiences and common interests.

Both types of rapport are super-important to a connector. It's very hard to develop long term rapport if you've started off on the wrong foot and not built it at the 'instant' stage. Equally, the attraction of the initial rapport you create with someone pales significantly if they lose credibility by constantly letting you down, failing to deliver on their promises or lose interest in being with you.

Into this category tumble lots of relationships, personal or business where, for whatever reason, the two parties have fallen out of rapport. You may even be in conflict, and one or both of you is paying the price in hurt feelings. And battered emotions, socially or in business, are not a steady platform upon which to build anything.

The 20 steps to developing great rapport

Creating great rapport is about helping people who meet you for the first time to think that they made a good choice! In short, they must immediately see some benefit from investing their time with you. You need to learn how to maximise those first few minutes they spend with you, so that you can use it as a 'spring board' to develop a relationship.

When you meet people your main aim should be to have them relax with you. No one gets fully involved in networking or making 'commitment' decisions when they are uptight or unsure. You want (and need) your contacts to like and trust you because if they don't they won't maintain the relationship and certainly won't do business with you if they can help it.

The champion connector knows he needs to cover these 20 bases in this section when meeting people. Handle them well and the door will be open for you to build a solid foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship. Handle them badly and you may find the door well and truly locked.

Rapport builder #1...The show's over in 15

Try this one for size ... you have, at the most, 15 seconds to make a fabulous first impression - and first impressions stick. We live in a world where we have information bombarding us all the time, so we must form quick judgements about people and things. Arguably, it's always been like that. The caveman had 15 seconds to decide whether the animal he was facing was his supper or whether he was its intended feast. Snap decisions on 'fight or flight' were the order of the day long ago!

As then, we take a mental snapshot of the situation in front of us and act accordingly. Do we like the look of this person? For the connector the answer has got to be 'yes' or he will have real difficulty in building rapport with his conversation partner. Think of a 'no' as starting a 100 metre race ten yards further back than the rest of the competitors...it's going to be hard work and your chances of success are slim.

Rapport builder #2...Smile!

A smile shows that you are warm, open and friendly. A poker face, rightly or wrongly, sends out a signal that you are serious, possibly cold and unapproachable. A smile carries your personality with it, lights up your face and puts a sparkle in your eye. Use it to say "I'm really happy to see you" even before you've opened your mouth. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so too is a smile to a connector.

Think of a 'flirting' smile. You look ... then you smile, broad and warm, not a silly grin. If you don't like that allegory, think of the sun coming out from behind a cloud ... it gathers in intensity and warmth as it moves out into the open.

But beware of the danger of smiling too much, too often. The idea is to create a special smile for the unique person in front of you, not an automatic grin for everyone you see. A fixed smile for all will be perceived as false, even if it's genuinely meant... a poor politician's tactic.

Rapport builder #3...Put them in the spotlight

Every good connector knows that the secret of getting people to like you is to show how much you are interested in them. Dale Carnegie, in his best seller 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' written in 1936 highlighted this message and it's been used ever since by those who know that focusing on others, not themselves, is the secret of success.

For most people, however, the problem is that we get overtaken by self-consciousness, and spend too much time thinking about what impression we are making and what we 'should' be doing next, instead of reacting spontaneously and naturally to the other person in the way we do when we are with someone we feel very comfortable with.

Rapport builder #4...Matchmaker, make me a match.

Not everyone under pensionable age will remember the classic song from the film "Fiddler on the Roof" imploring the village's matchmaker (who found wives for lovelorn bachelors) to help, but the technique holds true.

The matchmaker analysed the physical and personality traits of the gentleman in question and found a compatible partner - a 'match'. And the social psychologists have done the same. Whilst they may not be able to belt out a song quite like the cast of the film they can give us some great advice on building good feelings between people. It goes like this: match the posture and rhythm of the person you want to gain rapport with, and watch what happens.

We're talking here about listening and observing, matching their energy but not mimicking. It's about broadly 'mirroring' their general posture, speech and tone of voice talking the language they are familiar with and using the words they would use. It's even about getting in step with the rhythm of their breathing. This is by no means as far-fetched as it sounds. Therapists have been using the technique for years to help their patients feel close to them.

But the next stage is where the therapists really turn it on. After a short while 'mirroring' and getting in tune with their contact's mood, they then 'lead' them with their own body language and pace, moving them from a negative frame of mind and closed posture to a more open and receptive one. It works!

Make no mistake; we're not talking here about a gimmick to trick your contact into believing you are interested in them when you are not. You naturally fall into body and voice tone alignment when you are genuinely interested in them and sensitive to their needs.

No one who is down ever appreciates an insensitive 'cheer up it may never happen' comment. But they usually welcome a sympathetic voice tone and a comment 'you look a bit down ... is there anything I can do to help?' The time for the coach's slap on the back and pep talk comes later, once rapport is established. Connectors know that they need to mirror others before bringing them up to their speed.

Look at lovers in a restaurant - the tell tale 'mirrored' body language, eye contact and pace of speech usually gives them away - even if they are trying to hide it. If you observe closely enough you may even see them pick up their drinks at the same time, or just seconds after each other.

Knowing the positive effects of matching people's mood and movement is one of the real secrets of instant rapport. Use it wisely and mirror, don't copy. You may have played a game when you were a child, or even as an adult if you've still got some fun left in you, where you copied everything your pal did just as soon as they did it. You repeated what they said and were just a split second behind in every move they made. Do you also remember how mad they got when you continued to do it, and how irritated you felt when your pal did the same to you? The technique is subtle, not blatant, and should be employed with the aim of meeting your contact's needs, not manipulating them.

In practice

Mirroring can be done consciously in a business situation. David Lewis, author of the Secret Language of Success, has found that mirroring increases the chances of agreement by up to 50% during negotiations and doubles your chances of making a favourable impression during sales presentations.

Rapport builder #5...Are you in, or out?

Top connectors have developed a 'nose' for whether they are in or out of rapport with someone. They've heightened their sensitivity to both the obvious and more subtle 'tell tale' signs of what people say, the way they say it, and how they hold themselves. It's more than recognising a rebuff when asking for a date; it's about reading between the lines of body language and to see what people are really thinking.

What's the red light, which warns you that you haven't got rapport with someone? Simple, you'll be acting and thinking differently to them.

Try this

Take this little social interaction experiment with someone you know well and have a good rapport with; your partner, a work colleague or a friend for example.

Get into a normal conversation with them (which means that you're very likely to be in rapport) and then after a short while deliberately try to get out of rapport. Unsynchronise your body language by changing your posture, hold your gaze for less time and look away more frequently, make your voice higher or lower, or each pause faster or slower. Change your mood to be different to theirs; be demonstrably happier or more morose.

If you try to do all these at once you'll look and sound like a maniac and have your friend dialling the local ambulance service. Just try one or two of these permutations and watch your rapport level sink as you both become more uncomfortable.

It's a dynamic demonstration of the building blocks of rapport and how quickly, through lack of knowledge or inappropriate use, they can bring them tumbling down.

Rapport builder #6...Dress to Impress.

This doesn't mean that you have to wear a tuxedo all the time, or even your best clothes. But the instant rapport kings recognise that to be liked by people it's important to look like them too.

It's all about group 'norms' as the social workers would call it, but to you and me a more memorable rule of thumb definition is "when in Rome, do as the Romans do". A three-piece suit might have made you stand out from the crowd in ancient Rome, but it wouldn't have been your ticket to the toga wearing 'in crowd'.

If your organisation is a casual dress environment, wear casuals, if it's a formal suit place, do that. I'm not suggesting that everyone should be a dress clone of everyone else, but particularly if you are meeting contacts for the first time or early in your relationship, give some thought to being 'like them' in your attire; unless they dress like a tramp, of course.

Rapport builder #7...Strive to be interested not interesting.

Some would-be rapport builders go wrong as soon as they utter their first words - because their whole attitude to the process is wrong. They think that building rapport is about impressing the other with their innate charm and wit. The 'aren't I a great guy' approach seldom works, and is a high risk strategy.

The professionals take the opposite, and altogether more successful, route. They become fascinated with the other person (and most people *are* fascinating when you get to know them) by asking them about themselves, finding out about their family, their views, their experiences, their hopes for the future ... hobbies, holidays, cars - anything, in fact, that both parties find of interest.

Seek to find out more about others and what makes them "tick" be *interested* rather than try to be *interesting* and you will both enjoy the conversation, what's more you'll be building great rapport as they share information insights and views with you. and its less wearing on your nerves than trying to roll out your party piece "one liners" again in a desperate bid to entertain and be interesting.

Rapport builder #8...Size nines, slim fit.

'Put yourself in their shoes' are the words our mother used to say to my brother and myself when we were moaning about someone or something. I can hear her saying it now as I recall us bemoaning the fact that we had no electricity in the home one evening - part of a series of 'blackouts' caused by an energy crisis in the UK in 1974 as a result of the miners' strike.

'Put yourself in their shoes' she said 'these people have blackouts too, but they are fighting for their jobs, their pits and the survival of their whole community' she added. Gulp! She changed our perspective on that transient irritation.

The point? You can't begin to build real rapport with people unless you seek to understand them, to see things through their eyes, to try to experience things the way they do.

Try this

Put yourself in the shoes of your partner or a friend. Consider their role in life, what they do with their time and, in particular, the challenges they face. (If you find this difficult maybe you are not as close as you think). Imagine you were them. Try to 'feel' like they do, and its almost certain that if you've done it properly and really got 'into' their life and mindset you'll have a fresh appreciation of them as a person. You'll understand them at a much higher level than before.

What's the implication for networkers? Observe people's mood and demeanour before you rush in. What's happening with them at that moment? Match their mood, happy or sad. Empathise with them, and then you have earned the right to move them gently towards your mood.

Rapport builder #9...Use their name

Dale Carnegie described it as the "sweetest sound anyone ever hears". Yes, people pay attention when they hear their own name (think back to school); they love you when you remember it, and you make them feel special when you use it.

What's the moral? Don't forget it for one thing, and make sure that you use it appropriately in conversation. Chapter 4 will give you the "how to's" of remembering and using peoples' names, but whatever you do, do it.

Rapport builder #10...You too!

You instantly feel closer to people who have something in common with you, whether its your home town, a mutual friend, a love of the same football team, sport or hobby, you went the same school and have the same views on ... whatever. It doesn't really matter what, people usually love to have things in common; it makes them feel fine, they are on familiar territory - and they like you for it.

The implication of this social phenomenon for connectors is obvious. Listen for areas of common interest or view, and ask questions that will get you on the highway to shared interests. Queries like, "is that a London accent I detect?" and "how do you spend your time when you're not at the office?" are gentle routes to common ground. And, at the very least, they are great conversation developers. At a party, for example, a great way of establishing common ground with people you don't know is to ask "how do you know the host?" You're almost certainly onto a good topic for developing some common ground. Unless, of course, you are talking to a gatecrasher!

Rapport builder #11...Roll out the red carpet

Making contacts feel special is an attribute of all the great connectors. That means genuinely caring about the wellbeing of others, and observing – even stretching - the social graces in order to demonstrate that you like and respect the person with you.

For the uninitiated "red carpets" are traditionally used for royalty and other dignitaries as a sign of respect for their position. The connector's red carpet treatment takes the form of including their contact fully in the conversation, asking their views and listening attentively to their opinion. Rapport builders make sure that their companion is comfortable, fed and watered and administered the range of social graces appropriate to the situation and culture, from refreshing their drink to opening the door, passing the biscuits, to holding the umbrella.

You already know the 101 things you could do to make your contacts feel better about knowing you and being with you. All of them add up to you saying 'you are important to me'. Appeal to a person's need to feel special and they'll love you for it.

Rapport builder #12...Introduce yourself with panache

The way you introduce yourself sends an instant message to your contact. The words you use and the way you deliver them speak volumes about the way you feel about yourself and your position in life.

Because it's so important I've devoted a whole section to it in a later chapter. But suffice it to say here, a downbeat delivery shouts 'boring'. Self-previews are the equivalent of surfing the radio channels for one that tickles your fancy! Based on what you hear, you decide almost immediately whether to move on to the next station or to 'tune in'. It's the same with introductions. A poor one will have your contact tuning you out even before you've got started. And whilst they may not be rude enough to metaphorically 'change channels' and move on immediately, they'll have made their mind up that there's something more to their taste elsewhere.

Check out how to grab your contact's interest with your self-preview

Rapport builder #13...Deliver it warm, and with hooks

It's not what you say, it's how you say it that's important in your opening line. In fact you can say almost anything you want as an opener as long as it puts people at their ease and sounds warm and friendly. Your job here is no more than to demonstrate to them that you think that they are OK and to break down the almost inevitable feeling of subliminal fear, suspicion and mistrust (back to caveman/women instincts I'm afraid).

The key message here is not to worry about your first words, since 80% of your listener's first impression hasn't got anything to do with your words anyway. All you need is an empathic mood, a positive attitude and a warm and friendly delivery.

Like fishing with several lines at once, the best way to get your 'hooks' into a conversation from the start is to give your conversation partner plenty of bait. This means providing information about yourself so that they can follow up whichever 'line' most appeals

Rapport builder #14...Shake, touch or not?

Not every situation warrants a handshake, a hug a kiss on the cheek or any kind of touch at all. You need to be guided by your own feelings at the time and the social 'norms' of the particular situation. Nevertheless, if you do have to shake hands there's some do's and don'ts to watch out for.

Rapport builder #15...Hand Shakes

A key aspect of building rapport is a good, firm handshake. Men's handshakes are usually firm because they naturally have a stronger grip than their female counterparts. Your handshake, rightly or wrongly telegraphs a great deal of information about you and your attitude. Many potential relationships have 'hit the rocks' before they've begun because of a weak and lifeless handshake which the recipient has interpreted as the attributes of their 'co-shaker'.

The accepted protocol for females is that its better to err on the side of firm than weak. If you go for 'weak' you'll be in danger of having your fingers crushed by some of the more insensitive hand shakers. Go for firm!

Here's a few handshakes you'll meet in your networking travels.

Normal - where the hands fit snugly together 'web to web'. Moving up and down two or three times for usually no more than three seconds, the hands themselves remain parallel and vertical, with both parties exerting the same amount of pressure.

Controller - where a person extends his hand to you, web-to-web but as soon as your hands are linked, he purposely places his hand onto the top. This is a sign that he is trying to take charge. It means that you will need to be a step ahead of the relationship going forward.

Dead fish – Where there's very little movement in the other person's hand. No emotion passes to and, just like handling a dead fish, the hand is often 'clammy'. All in all you usually can't wait to remove your hand.

Fingers only – where only the fingers are offered and you're not exactly sure how to grasp them or how hard to shake. This is both a male and female trait, but ladies do it largely for fear of their hand being crushed by their male counterpart

Sandwich – where you envelope the person's hand with both of yours. Politicians often use this technique to show sincerity (watch them on the TV), but it's best used with people you know well.

The Bone Crusher – some men haven't got the hang of how much force to use in a handshake and tend to over do it with a vice-like grip. This is usually due to misguided effort to have a firm handshake, or a tactic to intimidate.

Rapport builder #16...Get closer, and use touch appropriately

Cementing feelings of rapport has got a lot to do with using your personal space correctly. We'll get into this later in this chapter but for now, suffice it to say that we all have our own personal space bubble into which we only allow people we know and trust. If someone who doesn't fit this criteria enters we try to back off and regain a comfortable space between ourselves and our conversation partner.

You'll see this all the time in the pubs and clubs around town. Observe if the young lady or man moves closer to or further away from their conversation partner. It's a sure sign of whether they are in rapport or not.

Sitting next to your contact rather than opposite him, to look at a brochure or some information for example, creates a feeling of sharing and closeness. Financial planning and other sales people use this technique regularly when visiting homes to 'build a bond' with prospective clients.

In practice

A study of sales people and the power of touch in influencing a sale generated some remarkable findings. One group of sales people were asked to go through their normal sales routine but were told that, apart from shaking hands, they were not to touch their prospective client.

The second group, however, were given instructions to touch their prospective client at an appropriate time during the meeting, on the upper arm - somewhere between the shoulder and elbow. Example situations would be when escorting them into the elevator, showing them to the meeting room, when emphasising a particular point where they wanted the attention of their prospective client. There were lots of natural opportunities to do so in most situations.

The idea was to do it as naturally as possible as part of normal body language. And, guess what? The 'touchers' clinched significantly more (48% more!) sales than those who kept their hands to themselves.

The researchers concluded a few things from the experiment, all of which are absolutely relevant to anyone who wants to build rapport.

Touching a "non-threatening" area of another person is a good way to show that you like them and feel comfortable with them. It allows you into their personal space with little risk of rejection and embarrassment and, as long as it is perceived by the other as having no ulterior motive, is socially acceptable and helps build a bond.

But beware, there are only a few non-threatening areas to go at. Shaking hands, touching the upper arm momentarily, and the back at shoulder blade height is ok. You may get away with tousling your young son's hair as a sign of affection and closeness, but it wouldn't quite have the same effect on an adult you've just met!

The researchers in the touching the arm experiment went a stage further, in fact, and explored what the results would be if the sales people touched prospective clients on their lower arm, from the elbow to the hand? They particularly observed the reaction of the people being touched. When asked afterwards, many said that they felt that their personal space had been invaded and that the action was inappropriate for the situation. Others said that they liked it, and the other person more as a result!

Perhaps it's in the technique and how it's done, but the key message is that touch is a rapport building technique of the top performers when it's done naturally, appropriately, and with absolute integrity.

Rapport builder #17...Get onto their "wavelength"

You can smile, use open body language, mirror them and use touch appropriately to help build rapport, but if you really want to get "under the skin" of someone, you'll need to get right on their wavelength.

And that means asking open questions about them, using language that they will identify with and really find out what they want for themselves. In a nutshell, "what makes them tick"?

Much of what's written in sales textbooks can be boiled down to this: No matter what you are selling, if you are dealing with people, its all about:-

1. Identifying what they want, and how you or your product or service can help them get it.
2. Encouraging them to like you, by creating and maintaining rapport.
3. Giving them the "feel good" factor that you are the right answer.

The hundreds, nay thousands, of sales techniques can be slotted into these three categories and leaving aside the whacky and downright manipulative ones, they'll all contribute. But whatever profession you are in, recognise these three stages and plot your position in relation to your key relationships.

In practice

One person who's made a science out of this, and built a highly successful business based on the principles is Harvey MacKay, author of the best seller "Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive". The book focuses on the business building benefits of creating wonderful relationships with customers by really getting on their wavelength.

He built a customer-focused attitude in his sales force by training them to learn about 66 (yes, sixty-six) aspects of their customer's personal and professional lives. MacKay's list includes finding out about obvious things like their family situation, where they go on holiday, sports, hobbies, likes and dislikes, what they want from their suppliers, their relationships and their life.

But that's only part of the equation. MacKay also trains his people how to, appropriately, send cards, thank-you's and information relevant to their goals, hobbies and ambitions. It's a mammoth exercise in building customer relations, and it wins because Harvey's systematic approach to building relationships to generate sales keeps customer relations absolutely where it should be - right at the front of the minds of his people.

Rapport builder #18...Use space effectively

The Neuro Linguistic Programming gurus have pointed out the real importance of knowing what 'space' does to your rapport building efforts. When you are sitting next to someone and want to show them something, say a book or report or, a classic example, a photo album your best bet for successful rapport building is to sit next to them. The position of you both naturally leads to a feeling of sharing and togetherness.

When you sit opposite, the reverse can happen. You're eyeball to eyeball with the other person, a position that adds formality and seriousness to the situation. You have the "space" between you now, and an invisible line drawn down the middle of it.

Doctors have now moved away from the face to face position to the 'side on' approach (see diagram) - because its a half way house between the informality of sitting next to each other, and sitting directly opposite with the desk as a barrier between you.

Connectors know that one of the great rapport-building secrets is to align their body so that they are pointed in a similar direction to their conversation partner. As a result, they and their contacts are much more likely to view things in the same way and be on the same wavelength. They are going in the same direction and they share the same space in front of them. The demarcation line doesn't exist.

Try this

When you are out of rapport with someone try aligning your body direction with theirs. Face the same way, get next to them, share the space in front of you, and feel the change in atmosphere between you. It works!

Top connectors in business recognise the need to use space to their advantage. If they have to give a formal reprimand to a work colleague or a supplier they may think twice about sitting next to them, or even at right angles. We'll pick up on the connector's tactics for seating arrangements later, but t give you a sneak preview, take a look at this:

In practice

One senior partner of an international law firm made a science out of this. For formal discussions with representatives of the 'other party' he would have them sit opposite him.

In subsequent discussions when progress was being made on particular negotiation points he reverted to the semi-formal 'right angle' position to lessen the potential for conflict and improve the feeling of 'coming closer together' on a settlement. Finally, when he'd got to the point of knowing what his offer should be and needed to persuade the other side that this was a 'win offer' for them, the next meeting he'd have would be at the smaller round table in his office.

He would sit next to them to share thoughts (and common space). He'd take his professional rival through a document, highlighting points with his pen. His subliminal message was that we've now reached common ground, we're seeing things the same way, we are equals and, in fact want the same things. Now that's intelligent, and case winning, use of space to help you achieve your rapport building goals.

Rapport builder #19...Reveal yourself

You can only go so far in building rapport if you don't tell people anything about yourself. The experienced connector's rule of thumb is to provide enough personal information so that their conversation partner gets some 'hooks' to hang their own questions upon.

That means matching your conversation partner's level of openness -possibly more if it's a relationship you wish to pursue (it stimulates the conversation and signals sharing) and divulging less if you don't wish to go any deeper. All straightforward common sense, and it usually happens automatically, because people become guarded with folk they are unsure of. Nevertheless, consciously knowing what you are doing, and why, is a valuable weapon to use.

Rapport builder #20...Listen to them

If you don't listen to what your contact has to say you'll surely fail to develop the full level of rapport possible for the situation. Connectors have trained themselves to listen, not only to the whole of what their conversation partner has to say, but also to tune into the big rapport building moments. When they hear their conversation partner start to say "I think....I want...My view is... etc" they know that good material is on its way because they are revealing what is important to them.

Listening properly creates empathy and a feeling in your conversation partner that you understand them and that you accept their views without judgement. Coupled with the body language techniques we'll discover later it says 'you're safe here' 'I'm like you' and even 'I like you' - all without you uttering a word.

Let's recap on the basic building blocks of creating a powerful presence and building instant and long lasting rapport.

Step 1. Stand tall.

We've just seen the value of carrying yourself properly, so shoulders back, chest comfortably out, relaxed but confident walk, open palms and move to

Step 2. See

Make eye contact and remember to 'see' your contact as warm and friendly and your eyes will soften accordingly. We don't want cold or piercing eyes here, it's not a staring out contest! Eye contact is all about letting people see a little of your soul, your warm and friendly personality reflected in your eyes, but there's no need to hold it for too long. A couple of seconds of solid eye contact whilst smiling should do the job.

Step 3. Smile

We're talking here about a warm smile, not a cheesy grin, or a feeble attempt. If you don't know (or can't feel) the difference, practice yours in the mirror. It's not as crazy as it sounds. You've probably never focused on your own smile before (after all you usually can't see your own face in normal day-to-day interaction) so give it a go and experiment with different smiles. Remember you are after a warm one, one that portrays you as friendly and approachable, not a crazed clown.

Step 4. Speak

Greet your conversation partner warmly and appropriately. Be professional, don't be over familiar too soon. Your aim is to create the right impression not engender the feeling that you are pushy or not observing the social graces. The appropriate opener may range from 'hi' and 'hello', to 'good morning' or 'good evening' depending on the context. But whatever the words, say them with a spark of enthusiasm, and a very distinct undertone that you are, indeed, very glad to meet them.

Step 5. Shake

Shake hands (if appropriate) and if you do, do it properly. Not all greeting occasions warrant a handshake or hug, of course, and some people are reticent about doing it anyway. Play it by ear and be prepared.

If you are called on to 'shake' the correct way to do it is to grasp the whole hand of your contact and go 'web to web' giving it a brief but solid squeeze – not a vice like grip, and not an impression of a wet fish. Keep it brief ... too long and your contact will start to feel uncomfortable.

6. Sound interesting!

Who could forget the distinctive sounds of 'Satchmo', Louis Armstrong, or Barry White, Ella Fitzgerald or Tina Turner? And we've all been moved by a silky male or female voice when we've met someone for the first time. However, even the most good looking of connectors can spoil their image with an unpleasant voice and tone.

7. Question and listen

You win by understanding others and you can't do that if you don't ask the right questions and listen to what they have to say in answer. Of course, you play your part in providing information to develop the conversation and the relationship, but by questioning with genuine interest, and listening actively, you can't help but develop rapport. You'll control the conversation too...but more of that in the next chapter.

The power of body language

Would you believe that the most influential pre-twentieth century study of body language was Charles Darwin's 'The Expression of the Emotions in the Man and Animals' published in 1872.

Since then, researchers have identified nearly one million non-verbal cues and signals. Experiments by Albert Mehrabian, one of the later body language gurus, shook traditional views of communication when he pronounced that the total impact of a message is about 7% verbal (words only) and 38% vocal (including tone of voice, inflection and other words) and a staggering 55% non-verbal (body language to you and me).

As a follow on, Professor Ray Birdwhistell calculated that the average person only speaks words for a total of about 10 or 11 minutes a day and that the average sentence takes only 2.5 seconds! Like Mehrabian he found the verbal component of a face-to-face conversation is less than 35% and that over 65% of communication takes place non-verbally. That's the reason why connectors have to know the body language 'lingo' and work with it.

You may not have given it much thought up to now, but the basic body language movements gestures are the same all over the world. People smile when they are happy; frown or scowl when they are angry or upset. Nodding the head is almost universally used to indicate 'yes' or affirmation. Likewise, shaking your head from side to side to indicate 'no' will be recognised by the vast bulk of the world population. It may even be a gesture that's in our genes. When a baby has had enough milk, for example, it turns his head from side to side to reject his mothers' breast.

The important point for the connector is that body language is just as critical as what you say. We've got to study this fascinating subject to make sure that the silent language of our body gives us the best opportunity to create empathy with our contacts. Ignorance, in this case, is not bliss.

Personal space

We've talked about personal space already in the context of 'presence' but there's much more to it than that. Like other animals man has his own portable personal 'air bubble' that he carries around with him. The size of yours at any given time is depends on where you are, the message you are giving and who you are giving it to. The psychologists tell us that we all have four distinct zone distances.

The Intimate Zone. Between 6 to 18 inches. Where only those who are emotionally close to that person are allowed in. This includes lovers, parents, spouse, children, close friends and relatives.

The Personal Zone. Between 18 – 48 inches. This is the distance we put between us and others at cocktail parties, office parties, social functions and friendly gatherings.

The Social Zone. Between 4 – 12 feet. We stand at this distance from strangers and people we do not know very well – or don't like much

The Public Zone. If we are talking to a large group of folk, anything over 12 feet is the comfortable distance at which we chose to stand. Anything closer and we feel 'hemmed in'.

We've seen already that one of the first ways your behave impacts relationship building is through your posture. You can walk into a room and, with the aura you create, command respect before you even say a word. Conversely, you can also lose respect without uttering even a single 'hello'. To gain respect, you need to know and respect who you are; others will then want to do the same.

People tell you through their posture whether they are approachable and want to include you in their conversation. When two people are facing each other and forming a rectangle, they give the message that they have 'closed off' their space and do not wish to be interrupted. (see illustration). On the other hand, when two people have their feet pointed outwards like two sides of an incomplete triangle, they are inviting you into the conversation. (see illustration).

Arms – as you probably already know, when someone's arms are folded it tends to indicate that they are in a defensive, nervous or somehow threatened attitude of mind. Generally they may be feeling uncomfortable with the situation, what you are saying or some other aspect beyond your control. When people feel vulnerable they tend to shield their chest by folding their arms.

In practice

Ace connectors have varied techniques for 'unlocking' those arms and moving them into a more neutral and helpful position. For example, extending their hand to shake hands if they have not done so already, or asking for a business card and offering theirs.

In more formal networking situations they may share a brochure with their conversation partner or move them out of the immediate environment by suggesting a visit to the buffet table or to a publications display or exhibition stand, for example. When contact's arms are unfolded they tend to be more receptive. But watch out if they immediately fold their arms again now is probably not the best time make your pitch.

Try this ...

Visualise in the same way that top sports people do. Rehearse being the person you want to be. See yourself with great posture, greeting people, shaking hands, smiling your 'sunny' smile and using your warm steady gaze. Hear yourself chatting comfortably with everyone. Feel the pleasure of knowing you are happy to be there and that people like you. See yourself as somebody with something unique about you.

The more you visualise yourself in this way the more you will 'become' that person. You'll feel more and more comfortable with the image you have created and will behave accordingly.