



What is 'rapport'?

Mark Rendell, independent trainer and project manager, ponders a recent experience in the training room and asks if this is an example of 'rapport'?

I've got a theory that with those experiences, emotions and situations that we Brits find hard to grapple with, we often allocate a foreign word to them. *Rapport* is a good example. This elusive state that may exist somewhere between recognition and acceptance is a puzzling one for trainers. Can it be 'manufactured'? How much does it help the learning encounter? Do both parties experience it simultaneously? Does it matter if it doesn't happen?

Reaching for the dictionary, 'rapport' is described as being 'in sync' with another, 'on the same wavelength', 'in harmony'. Clearly, this state would be extremely useful in the learning encounter.

For me, rapport is an important measure of how well you are engaging your participants and how well they are engaging with you. I believe that the space called 'rapport' exists quiescently somewhere between us all in the training space. It is a matter of enacting it, waking it up, drawing it into the space through a variety of means: eye contact, body language, humour, empathy, listening, NVCs, engaging content, positive suggestions, linking to relevant and applicable scenarios etc.

When rapport is about to manifest, we effortlessly and subtly inflate this 'space'. We'll notice it in many different ways: our body language will respond imperceptibly at first, you and they will move towards each other, lean in, open out to allow you in. Eye contact will be maintained, a sense of 'flow' emerges, and a rhythm develops that you all respond to.

Your inner 'dials' all begin to tune into the same 'station'. They 'get' you, and you 'get' them. Agreement is made; an unconditional welcome has been extended. More becomes possible because trust and willingness to participate (to stay in the space) supports and maintains rapport. You, and they, are now *known*. Full participation is now possible. Rapport fills the room.

I experienced this in a training session I undertook back in May this year. It sort of rolled in like a wave. I spotted it first in a shift in body language about 45 minutes into the session. The participants had leaned forwards and maintained eye contact with me. I also noticed a relaxation in posture and ready contribution to my questions and prompts. There was also laughter, humour, nods and warmth.

So, for me, rapport is experienced as the *transition from stranger to member*. From exclusion to inclusion. I felt understood and my fear about being misunderstood ('Do they get me?', 'Do they understand me?' and 'Do I understand them?'), melted away rapidly. Rapport seems to me to be the expression of a group that consciously recognises that it shares the same understanding or viewpoint about something.

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