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## Just Gotta Have It—Part 2

In our last column we began to look at the concept of rapport and how it develops between people as they learn about one another. The beginning of rapport is often just the required social politeness we offer one another after first meeting. This is the social dance of the newly introduced. We comment on something we have in common to take that first step. Have you ever said something like, “How about this weather?” It is an experience you both have shared separately, yet commonly, which begins the conversation. “I don’t remember it being this [hot/cold, dry/wet, cloudy/sunny] for this long.” It is a place to begin to see if there is a real shared bond to be expanded in the future.

The nature of this first comment is not personal, nor is it invasive; it is simply a comment on a shared experience that is true for both parties. This may or may not lead to more conversation, but the ice has been broken and words spoken. Once a conversation begins there is permission for both parties to speak again and to expand to an ever-widening and more personal dialogue.

If you travel on planes, like we do, it is always dangerous to make eye contact or speak to your fellow passengers since they may take this as an opportunity to occupy themselves for the next several hours using you for company. Pull the book out, open the newspaper, close your eyes and nap, but don’t speak to them or you are trapped. However, in an interview the parties have an obligation to continue the conversation so the dance continues.

### Curiosity

One of the most interesting aspects of rapport is its relationship to curiosity. Now, curiosity could be fostered by any number of things—a piece of jewelry, presence at a location, an idle comment, or an observation of an event. When we talked about “our Dans” in the last column, they were people everyone enjoyed being around. We wonder if it wasn’t peoples’ desire to hear the next quip or share the next laugh that allowed him to join in conversation. It really is curiosity about what will happen next, but done in a way not to invade the person’s private thoughts.

Personal questions are generally best avoided during the early part of the conversation since people will not willingly share this information with strangers. The more of these questions you ask, the stranger you will appear. However, if you have observed a personal interaction the individual has just engaged in, you

might make a comment to him that seems to reflect his personal feelings. If you are able to do this, it may open a more intimate conversation.

Not long ago we observed a disgruntled customer speaking in a bitter fashion to a sales associate. After the customer left, we commented to the clerk that the customer could use some interpersonal skills, which confirmed what the sales associate was thinking. Her rapport with us was instantaneous as she related the events leading up to the dispute. Her openness about the dispute and willingness to discuss an embarrassing event was clearly the result of offering an opinion she was already thinking. We were of one mind with her even in this personal area, and this opened a more wide-ranging conversation than a comment on the weather would have done.

### Familiarity

Familiarity is another way to make people comfortable. Walking in the same neighborhood each day makes one fit in with the landscape. You belong here. You don’t cause trouble. You extend a wave to say good morning. You are okay.

A child psychologist in Texas uses this idea in his practice. When a child first comes to him he puts them in a room with some toys alone. He then enters the room for a moment to get something and smiles, next a smile and hello, then a short conversation before he leaves again. By the time he is ready to sit with the youngster, he has met him several times and is judged as safe. Now the business of learning more about the child and his interests can begin. It is alright to talk because it is safe to do so.

By contrast, someone making a personal comment about you without the comfort of being familiar sends up the red flags of danger. The salesman who pursues your interests too quickly and seems to try too hard to help scares you, which causes a withdrawal because his intentions are suspect. This is the same in an interview where the investigator presses for an admission too strongly. The interviewee thinks, “The admission is too important. The interviewer is trying too hard to get me to say something. I don’t trust him.” This is not the breaking of trust, because none yet existed. It is instead an uncertainty about the true motives of the individual.

### Betrayal

In long-term relationships where rapport has converted to trust, there is a feeling of comfort and familiarity born over

the years. Think about what happens when this type of trust is betrayed by lies. Is it ever really possible to enjoy the relationship in the same way again? It seems as though there would always be that part of the mind that would wonder and watch for the other shoe to drop. Trust is never truly given again.

Should an interviewer be surprised then, when he lies and is discovered, that he is not trusted? At the beginning of an interview there is only the initial social rapport in place, and maybe the individual's curiosity about his future holding things together. Now when the individual identifies a deception or is told wrong information, his distrust is strengthened and his resistance to believe anything the interviewer says increases. In this situation the presentation of even real evidence may be insufficient because of the investigator's earlier lies. Rapport is irretrievably broken and without a long relationship to fall back upon, there is little hope to salvage the encounter.

### Pace

Developing rapport is the part of a conversation that can be easy or strained, depending on the participants' feelings and points of view. When one party is ready to move into a more pertinent discussion and the other fails to notice this, the connection is lost. The interviewer needs to observe the individual and determine the pace of the conversation. If the interviewer fails to move at the subject's pace, it may engender resistance, anger, and impatience; all of which may impede the interview.

Sometimes the amount of rapport necessary can be predicted by the personality and business practices of the subject. Type A personalities generally are bored by the preliminaries and anxious to get to the heart of the matter. If one was to engage in idle chit chat with them, they would likely become frustrated or irritated at the delay. Determining how the individual handles day-to-day business will often give the interviewer an insight to the person's preferred pattern.

### Transference

Another means of establishing rapport is to transfer rapport with someone you both know. The common relationship with a third party moves the level of rapport between the two strangers more swiftly because they both trust the same person.

Using a supervisor to introduce the interviewer often helps quicken the initial development of a relationship. This can be particularly effective where a participatory accusation is contemplated. The participatory accusation encourages the subject to lie, believing there is no evidence of his wrongdoing. Careful questioning traps the individual in his lies and provides the proof of his deception. The interviewer may begin by asking the supervisor questions to open the door for the subject's questioning.

When we deal with the idea of rapport in interviews, the primary mistake is attempting to develop the deep level of rapport we have with old friends. Unless the individual is going to be questioned for days, such as in a serious criminal or terrorist debriefing, social rapport is sufficient for our needs in employee interviews. ■

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