

# Building Rapport and using Communication Skills

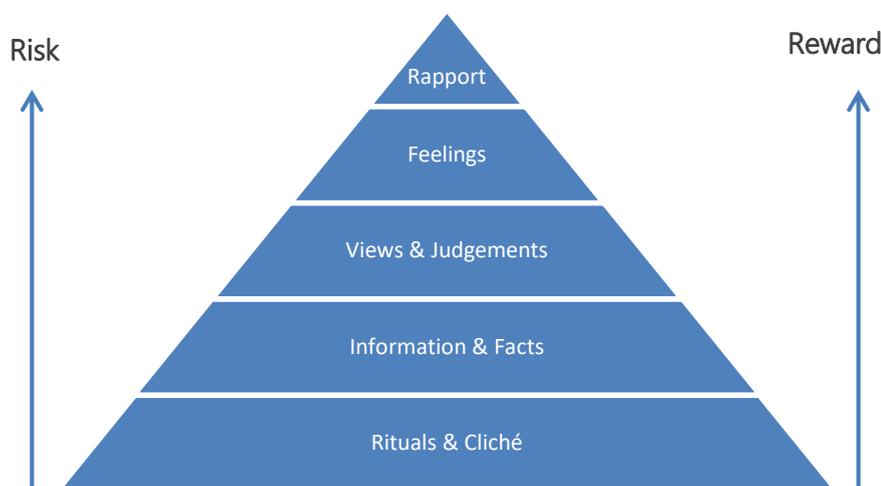
## Building Rapport

Building rapport is fundamental to mentoring relationships. Being in rapport with someone indicates trust and encourages open and honest conversations.

Being in rapport with someone takes time. It is the responsibility of both the mentor and mentee. Both parties need to work at building rapport and reflecting on whether the established relationship is 'working' or not. You often hear about people 'clicking', which may occur in the first mentoring session, or may take a few sessions to get to.

A mentoring relationship is not about building close friendships, but personality fit is important for going on to build trust, respect and confidence.

The communication triangle below shows the stages mentoring relationships go through before you are in rapport. As the reward increases, so does the perceived risk. Trust is a factor in how quickly you can progress to rapport.



Below are some guidelines for building rapport;

- Meeting face-to-face whenever possible
- Spend some time getting to know the person. What is important to them?
- Understanding past experience, and defining goals and objectives to work together on
- Establishing a comfortable environment for holding the sessions;
  - Where to hold meetings? Where can the both parties feel at ease?
  - How much privacy is needed? (Out of office? Away from noise?)

- Being open and honest with conversations, raising issues as and when they occur
- Working on something of importance to you and sharing your values and intent
- Showing your commitment to the relationship and acknowledge feelings
- Recognising the efforts being made and saying thank you

## Communication Skills

In a new mentoring relationship you will have to learn how each person communicates and how best to work together. To support your progression to enriching development conversations, the following communication skills can be used;

### Asking Open Questions

Asking questions is an important part of getting to know each other and exploring challenges. By asking open rather than closed questions, discussions are more likely to be wide ranging and lead to further questions and conversations. An example of a closed question is "Are you happy with your current career path?" This will lead to a yes/no response. Alternatively, by asking "What do you think about your current career path?" you are asking an open question.

### Using Non-Verbal Gestures

This is essentially using body language to communicate. Use open body language, such as; uncrossed arms, sitting comfortably but not slouched, and smiling. Mentors should try to remain focussed on the session, and not be distracted by other issues or day-to-day diversions (i.e. phones/emails). Body language can also be used to help create rapport but gently mirroring the body language of the other person.

### Using Verbal Encouragement

As well as using non-verbal gestures, using verbal encouragement as someone shares experiences or issues with you, demonstrates that you are listening and reinforces and you are engaged. Verbal encouragement includes using phrases such as; "What happened next?"

### Acknowledging Issues and Feelings

In mentoring relationships it's important to acknowledge issues and feelings as they arise. When someone is talking about something that really matters to them, they want to be heard. The listener needs to verbally and physically acknowledge this, reacting to the discussion as appropriate, such as; "Wow. That sounds like a really difficult task." And then follow-on with an open question to move the discussion forward; "How do you think you'll approach it?"

### Framing and Summarising

Throughout mentoring discussions, framing and summarising can help avoid misinterpretation. After a particular discussion, the key points can be summarised and repeated back. This technique can be used by the mentor or the mentee. The mentor can summarise back discussions to help frame a particular issue, helping the mentee reflect and evaluate. The mentee can repeat back, checking for understanding of mentor recommendations.