

2. Creating trust and equality

Taking time to get acquainted

The first time you speak to someone, it is important to break the ice and put the other person at ease. You can make good use of this phase by asking questions that yield interesting information about the coachee's background, current situation and future plans. By gaining a better understanding of where the coachee has come from and where he or she wants to go, you can offer better help.

- Questions about the past: place(s) of residence, family, significant events, friendships, relationships, education and career, health, hobbies, development, values and standards, etc.
- Questions about the current situation: place of residence, family, friendships, relationships, education and career, health, hobbies, development, values and standards, etc.
- Questions about the future: place of residence, family, friendships, relationships, education and career, health, hobbies, development, values and standards, dreams for the future, expectations, etc.

Creating the right setting

Sitting opposite one another, particularly at a desk, can encourage a competitive relationship during a conversation. Sitting alongside each other at an angle of 90 degrees can help create a framework for cooperation, which is important in the coach-coachee relationship. Since the aim is for the coachee to feel at ease raising problems and tackling them together, it is always the coach's task to ensure a good setting. This includes not only a pleasant seating arrangement, but also a conversation free from outside disturbances and unexpected visitors.

Clarifying expectations

To avoid misunderstandings, it is important to clarify expectations. It is a priority to explain that the coachee is responsible for achieving his or her own progress, and that it is the coachee's role to take an active attitude in this development process. It is also important to point out that you expect the coachee to be willing to look critically at himself or herself and at his or her own performance. The coachee should indicate when he or she feels uncomfortable about something or does not want to do something.

Building and maintaining rapport

Rapport arises naturally when people get on well with one another. It is described as mutual receptiveness and is visible in the matching or mirroring of non-verbal behaviour, use of voice and choice of words that takes place between people. By consciously matching non-verbal behaviour, use of voice and choice of words, you can build this receptiveness and trust, which is essential for the effectiveness of the coaching relationship in the longer term. It is important to understand that matching is not the same as imitating (although it may look that way to someone who does not know what is happening). It is simply adopting certain aspects of posture and gestures with which you build more trust. To find out whether you have rapport, you should mismatch and see whether the other person follows your behaviour. If they do, you have rapport. If they do not, you should return to matching the other person and try again later.

Exercise 2.1

Non-verbal, paralinguistic (use of voice) and verbal signals. Make a list of non-verbal, paralinguistic and verbal characteristics on which you can match another person. Take note! It is important not to make a list of personal judgements about these characteristics. For example, 'angry' may be judged on the basis of a loud volume of voice (use of voice), short sentences (verbal), swear words (verbal) and a particular facial expression (non-verbal). 'Nervous' is a judgement that may arise from observing rapid arm movements (non-verbal), a high-pitched voice (use of voice), apologies (verbal) and speed of speech (use of voice).

Exercise 2.2

Matching in the street. For this exercise, choose a place where you can follow someone without any difficulty, such as a park, a supermarket, a shopping street, and so on. Match various people in the way they:

- holds and moves the head;
- hold and move their shoulders;
- holds and moves the arms and hands;
- hold and move their upper body;
- breathes;
- hold and move their legs and hips;
- takes steps;
- hold their feet and at what angle these touch the ground.

Match each person for at least five minutes. Consider what it feels like to be this other person and write down these observations.

Exercise 2.3

Rapport over the telephone. Call a general organisation to request information (library, bank, museum, local council) and match the other person's use of voice on:

- Pace;
- Intonation;
- Volume;
- Rhythm;
- Timbre;
- Choice of words and use of sentences (types of words and length of sentences).

The easiest approach is to start with one aspect of the voice and then match the other elements one by one.

Exercise 2.4

Practising rapport in real situations. At a party, meeting or client conversation, practise matching at the non-verbal, paralinguistic (use of voice) and verbal level, consider what effect this has and write down your findings.

Exercise 2.5

Doing research. Immerse yourself in a hobby, field of work, culture or interest of a colleague or family member that is unfamiliar to you. By gaining a better understanding of the other person's reality, it becomes possible to empathise more fully with that person's situation and to connect with them in conversation.