



Communication

Building relationships with the people we want to influence is so important and is essential if we are to be successful in influencing change within health and social care.

How can we build relationships successfully?

- **Make the right first impression**
- **Build Rapport**
- **Establish Credibility**

Make the right first Impression

Why should we be concerned about the first impression we make?

Although it only takes 30 to 45 seconds to formulate a first impression, it often requires four or five additional encounters to change someone's first impression. If a first impression is negative, you may not have a second opportunity to change the impression!

What elements influence the first impression I make?

Physical elements such as posture and attire can influence the impression you make, but often, impressions are based on abstract qualities such as:

Appearance

All these factors leave impressions on the people you meet.

- clothes you wear
- personal hygiene
- posture
- your handshake

Knowledge – Although your intelligence will not be scored in a meeting it will be tested and judged based on your competence. You are expected to have an understanding of any subject you wish to talk about. Ensure you research the topic and be ready to quote any government policies/initiatives which are relevant. This not only shows the Health Professionals you have done your homework, but also makes it difficult for them not to take your issue seriously.

Social Composure – Comprised of grace, charm & etiquette. Being graceful in a meeting involves being comfortable in your surroundings. Knowing that you are appropriately dressed and are familiar with the customs & culture of the group will help put you at ease.

Being friendly is the key to exhibiting charm. You can build rapport with people by listening to and sharing with them. Be sure your communication involves a two-way exchange of information.

Displaying the proper etiquette for the environment will also lead you towards achieving a high level of social composure. Being polite, will communicate a desire to build a rapport.

Build rapport

Why is it important to build a rapport with others?

Rapport is a relationship of mutual trust. In any relationship, it is necessary for you to gain and maintain a sense of trust in order to communicate freely with one another. Without trust, communication is superficial at best and non-existent at worst.

How can I build a rapport?

Building a rapport is an ongoing process that begins when you have your first encounter. There are three guidelines you should follow to build a rapport:

Adapt to the other person's communication style – by paying attention to conversation and body language, you should be able to determine the other person's primary communication style. For example, if you determine that you are speaking to an inquisitor, you know that this person relies on fact rather than feeling when making decisions. In order to relate to the inquisitor, you would incorporate data into your conversation rather than intuition and emotion.

Find common ground with the other person – the second guideline is to find common ground which is often considered small talk in interactions with other people. Its purpose is to break down barriers and find a topic to which all people involved can relate. Possible areas of common ground include shared interests, mutual friends, current events or job-related topics.

Focus on mutually beneficial goals – the last guideline for building rapport is to identify mutually beneficial goals early in the conversation. For example, if you are trying to influence a change in a service which is provided in your area, establish how this will mutually benefit patients & health professionals and your rapport will continue because you are working towards a common goal.

Establish Credibility

Why is it important to establish credibility?

Credibility is respect for and belief in a speaker. A speaker must have credibility to ensure their message is understood correctly and if there is no credibility, the listeners are not likely to pay attention to the speaker. Even if the message is heard, it will be affected by the listener's distrust for the speaker, and the message will be distorted.

How can I establish credibility?

At the beginning of a conversation, the speaker has a clean slate. As the speaker begins to communicate, the listener begins to form opinions about the speaker's credibility. There are four guidelines that help to establish credibility:-

1. **Demonstrate competence** – Listeners like to know that a speaker is knowledgeable about the topic. Citing statistics and examples will lend competence to your words. In addition being well prepared and organized will help demonstrate your competence as a speaker.
2. **Build trust** – Speakers often tell the truth in a conversation only to discover later that their listener did not believe what they said. If a listener has ever been lied to by a speaker or has reason to believe the speaker lied to others, they will distrust the speaker. It is important to speak honestly in every conversation in order to build a reputation for trust.
3. **Recognise similarities between speaker & listener** - frequently listeners are more likely to accept opinions or ideas of a speaker if they believe they have something in common with the speaker. Establishing common ground will display similarities, another reason why it is important to take time out to do this. Attire and language can also lead listeners to feel a connection to a speaker.
4. **Exhibit sincerity** – speakers commonly use compliments to gain the approval of their listeners. When a speaker offers positive and enthusiastic praise, the listeners are likely to believe the sincerity of the speaker. Conversely, when a speaker uses negative expressions and lacks enthusiasm, they leave a negative impression on the listeners. Their compliment will become suspect, and the credibility of the speaker will be in question.