



HOW TO BUILD HIGH LEVELS OF RAPPORT

by

Christopher Hegarty and Charlotte B. Milliner

“There is no bigger challenge than to communicate effectively”

How vital is establishing rapport with others? The majority of lost jobs at the executive level result from incompatibility rather than incompetence.

In the family, the breakdown of communication is responsible for more difficulties than any other issue, with the possible exception of financial problems.

This report is about the merger of two extraordinary communications technologies, and it identifies three skills which you can learn that can make you more effective in your dealings with other people. To become highly competent in using these skills requires training, but you will increase your ability somewhat just by reading this.

The first of these technologies is called Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Developed by Dr. John Grinder and Richard Bandler, NLP provides a remarkable framework for understanding the ways people communicate and the ways we process and retain information.

The second technology is Active Listening, developed by the pioneering educator and psychologist Carl Rogers. Active Listening proves to the person speaking that you are devoted to understanding his or her views and feelings. It saves time, reduces errors and creates a climate of cooperation and trust.

NLP skills are powerful tools for building rapport with people; to sell to them, negotiate with them, persuade them; to deal with them effectively. Two of those skills, which we'll cover in this article, are eye-accessing cues and the use of metaphor in communications.

Grinder and Bandler, in their research that led to the development of NLP, discovered that people receive, store, and retrieve information and create new ideas using one or more of three basic representational systems. These are: VISUAL — relating to pictures and images; AUDITORY — based on sounds and words; and KINESTHETIC — pertaining to sensations and feelings. They also discovered that there are clues we can observe that reveal which of these systems a person is using. One of those clues is the use of certain words (see see cutout #1, page 8). Another is eye movements. (see see cutout #2, page 8)

Why should we care about this? Does it matter that the person we're talking with is accessing his or her memory in the auditory system? Yes it does! If we're trying to negotiate with someone, to convince them of something, or to sell them something, we'll be much more successful if we can build rapport with that person — if they think we're a lot like them or that we think like them.

By using the proper words and phrasing, we can “talk the language” of the other person's representational

“Communication is improved dramatically when one person acquires new skills.”

Charlotte B. Milliner

system. When we do this, there's an instant boost to feelings of rapport. The person we're communicating with senses that we're alike. The net result is more effective communication and a better chance of achieving the outcome we want. Obviously, to do this we must know how to determine which representational system the other person is using. Fortunately, NLP shows us how.

SKILL # 1

THE EYES ... A Window To The Brain

One of the exciting discoveries to come from NLP research is that almost all people move their eyes in certain directions depending on the kind of thinking they're doing. These movements are called eye accessing cues (because they're cues to which representational system is being accessed). These are the cues:

Visual Eyes are looking straight ahead in an unfocused manner, or move up and to the left or up and to the right. Generally, up/left indicates that the person is remembering a visual image, while up/right is a cue that he or she is creating a new picture.

Auditory Eyes move level and to the right, level and to the left, or down and to the left. Level/left indicates remembering sounds; level/right, creating or hearing new sounds; down/left, talking to oneself (as if reciting something).

Kinesthetic Eyes move down and to the right. The person may be feeling emotions or may be accessing tactile or other physical sensations.

In addition to eye accessing cues, the other person's use of language can give us information. If he or she uses phrases like “I see what you're saying” (visual), “I hear you” (auditory) or “That feels right to me” (kinesthetic), we have additional clues about their representational system.

To put this information to use in building rapport, choose language and expressions that make the other person feel that you are like him. Imagine a sales situation in which the salesperson uses phrases like “I'm sure you see...” and “If this looks good...” while the prospect is thinking about the feelings and emotions that relate to the purchase. There's a mismatch. The prospect doesn't know why, but he or she isn't particularly comfortable with this salesperson.

If, on the other hand, the salesperson observes the prospect's eye movement, realizes what's happening and uses phrases like “I'm sure you feel good about...” and “If this fits...”, the prospect senses a kindred soul and is more at ease. In this situation, the sale is much more likely to happen. The example is as applicable to managing people, negotiating or presenting as it is to sales because they're all activities that are easier when good rapport exists.

Understanding eye-accessing cues and the importance of representational systems is only one facet of this remarkable technology called NLP. Take the time to find out more about it. Consider attending an NLP training session. You'll learn powerful skills that will make you a much more effective communicator.

SKILL # 2

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY

The Bible is full of metaphors. Children's nursery stories are frequently metaphorical. Great teachers and communicators since early times have understood that story telling and the use of metaphor and analogy can be a very effective way to make your point.

“The most frequent cause of stress is a breakdown in communications between well-intentioned people”

Christopher Hegarty

In training, negotiating and selling, the use of metaphor and analogy is powerful because it allows us to challenge the listener's beliefs and opinions without direct confrontation. New information can be presented in formats that are non-threatening and that don't cause people's defenses to rise.

Salespeople have long used directly illustrative stories to communicate the benefits of their products or services. There are tales of people who bought and became heroes — and of those who didn't buy and experienced problems or failure. The sort of metaphor and analogy we're talking about here is different from that. It's less direct.

By constructing a story or using analogies that make no direct reference to the person, situation or outcome we are dealing with, we can challenge opinions and ideas (partly on a subconscious level) or present new information in a way that's very likely to be accepted. Some people construct metaphors and analogies almost without thinking about it. For most of us, however, it's a process that requires some thought and effort.

The steps involved in constructing a metaphor or analogy are as follows:

1. Examine the problem
2. Locate all the nouns (people, places, things) in the problem.
3. Locate all the processes (verbs, adjectives, adverbs) in the problem.
4. Select the content of the metaphor (person, animal, abstract, etc.)
5. Create a noun in the metaphor for each noun in the problem.
6. Create a process in the metaphor for each process in the problem.
7. Design the story line to provide a desired solution or response.

To learn this skill, begin constructing metaphors and analogies. Observe situa-

tions in your daily life and create metaphors that mirror them. The more you practice this, the easier it will become. Next, turn the metaphors into stories. Look at a situation that you'd like to change, create the metaphor, and build a story that has an outcome that makes your point.

A well known example of the metaphorical story is the tale of the little boy who cried wolf. If a manager was experiencing disruptions because of an attention-seeking employee's constant and unnecessary requests for help, a “boy who cried wolf” type of metaphor could be very useful. The manager could make the necessary point without a direct confrontation about the specific behavior.

When someone needs to make his or her problems known to others, but is hesitant to do so, an appropriate metaphor might work very well (e.g., a manager could construct an analogy about a situation in which he was concerned about communicating a problem to someone, decided to tell him, and in doing so, created a richer working relationship). If we confront the situation literally, the person we're advising may come up with all sorts of reasons for not speaking up. By using the metaphor, we present the idea in a framework that avoids all that. Of course, there's the danger of oversimplifying a situation with a metaphor that's too general or that's inappropriate, but the principles of how and why to use metaphor in communication remains valid.

As you become increasingly aware of this communication skill, you'll learn that it is a powerful a tool. Particularly in resolving conflict, handling objections and presenting technical information to the novice, well selected and properly executed metaphors are among the most effective communication techniques known.

It may even be more effective to allow the person you want to communicate with to

“eavesdrop” while you tell the metaphor to a third party.

Here are several examples:

Story # 1

Sam was in the market for a word processing unit. “How do you use this thing?” he asked the computer salesperson. She said, “Just boot the disk here into the RAM, and the CPU does the rest.” “You’re kidding.” he said. “Doesn’t anybody speak English any more?”

“You’re right. I was only kidding.” she replied. “I was quoting from one of our brochures. You see this disk? It’s like a record on your turntable. You want to hear Classical music, you’ve got to pick the right record. You want to listen to Rock, you’ve got to have a different record. Instead of calling it a record, call it instructions. You want word processing, or a financial package, you need the right program for the computer. Get it?”

Now the salesperson was beginning to reach Sam. He had bought stereo sets before and could relate to what she was saying. She was using an analogy. Continuing to use analogies to stereos, the salesperson taught Sam how to use the computer.

Story # 2

Banking has become a different business in the last few years. Many institutions find they now have to sell prospective customers. A banker who attended one of our seminars designed the following metaphor, has delivered it to several new customers and reports great success. When it was appropriate to influence customers to purchase overdraft protection, he told them about his customer, Mr. S. “Now, Mr. S. didn’t want overdraft protection either, but changed his mind when he became aware it would cost him nothing if he didn’t use it, and it was there like a safety net no matter what. Well, Mr. S. went on a ski trip, was

seriously injured and hospitalized for weeks. Where normally he could transfer funds as necessary to his checking account, he was not able to do so. And that overdraft protection paid his regular major monthly bills and the additional odd checks including, by the way, his health and hospitalization insurance premium! He couldn’t thank me enough.”

Story # 3

A real estate salesperson was defusing an objection by a couple who were interested in waiting for the interest rates to drop. The agent knew that the price they were quoted for the property was good and more than likely the interest rates wouldn’t drop in the next few months. The couple loved the house, and the sales agent was concerned that it wouldn’t be available for long.

He told the couple the following story. “I have a friend who recently bought a new car. He knew that the prices would be coming down because the 1997s were now on the market and he had his eye on a 1996. Deciding to wait on the car that met his family’s needs for a potential savings of \$500.00, he went on vacation. He had his secretary keep an eye on the prices. One day when he called the office, his secretary told him the price had dropped on the car he was interested in. He told her to call the dealer and make a commitment on the car and if necessary to deliver a check to the dealer. His secretary called the dealer to make the arrangements only to find out that the car had been sold and they had no more cars of that specific model. The dealer searched to find the exact car but to no avail. My friend returned home to discover that he had to purchase his second choice in a car, disappointed he had waited for the discount.” The couple bought the house.

SKILL # 3

ACTIVE LISTENING - A New Approach That Will Supercharge Your Communications

Active listening requires intention, attention and skillful participation. It's a skill that can pay big dividends in achieving the outcome that you want.

"Nobody listens to me." "No one understands me." They're two of the most common gripes people have. And it's no wonder. Have you ever looked closely at most "listeners" in conversations? They're not listening "to" the other person, they're listening "against" the other person. This is particularly true when there's a disagreement between the parties. All too often, the "listener" is preoccupied with framing his or her next comment; with listening for ammunition; with finding ways to score points.

"The biggest complaint people have about salespeople is they don't know how to listen"

This kind of "listening" conveys a disinterest in what the speaker is saying, a lack of trust or concern, and it sets up (or worsens) an adversarial relationship between the parties. Effective communication cannot take place in this situation. Fortunately, there's a powerful antidote to this serious problem: "Active Listening."

When Carl Rogers developed Active Listening, he gave us a wonderful framework for building effective listening habits. Used properly, Active Listening techniques encourage the speaker to express, evaluate and clarify feelings that might otherwise have been suppressed. **The speaker is made responsible for his or her feelings and the listener is far better able to understand what is really being communicated.**

Active Listening techniques make it clear to the speaker that you are attempting to under-

stand him. The result is he's more willing (or less unwilling) to understand you.

Active Listening can be the single factor that makes the difference between the two cycles which we refer to as the Three R's (resistance-resentment-revenge) and the Three C's (clarity-cooperation-commitment) (see cutout #3, page 8). In the former, ineffective communication causes resistance. People begin to resent what others ask of them. Ultimately, they try to get even. The Three C's begins with people being responsible for bringing clarity to what they say. The result is that people begin to cooperate. Out of that comes commitment, both for themselves and for the group.

There are six basic steps in Active Listening. As you practice them, you'll be amazed at the increase in your effectiveness as a communicator and persuader:

1. **Take responsibility for understanding the other person before seeking to be understood.** Begin listening with a clear intent to understand the speaker (remember that understanding someone does not require that you agree with them).
2. **Match the tempo, tone, breathing and other body language of the speaker.** If you are excited and upbeat about an idea and you confront someone who speaks slowly, in sober tones, who's breathing slowly and deeply and who is relaxed or guarded in body posture, you'll have trouble communicating. You may overpower that person with your faster tempo, upbeat tone and excited posture. Match the other person first. As you feel rapport building, you can begin to move him or her (slowly) to your level of excitement or enthusiasm.
3. **Be very careful to listen "to" the speaker.** Refuse to be blinded by your

own prejudices. Assume you speak a foreign language and have no idea what the speaker means to convey. Concentrate. Keep your mind focused on what the speaker is “saying”, and how he is saying it .

4. **Watch for what will never be said out loud.** Sometimes people scream in silence. Read the nonverbal signals of others, and use nonverbal communication to reinforce your own message. Again, the technology of NLP can prove useful in understanding the meanings of many nonverbal cues. The way we look at others, our body posture (whether walking, standing or seated), the way we dress, how we hold a piece of paper, these and thousands of other nonverbal cues affect our communications. Learn to read them in others, and you will be a better listener. Learn to control them in yourself, and you will be a much more effective communicator.
5. **Watch and listen for feelings.** *The meaning in any communication is made up of both content and feelings.* Be aware of both, because if you catch only the content or only the feeling, you’ll receive only half the message. Make a particular effort to understand the speaker’s feelings, and remember that feelings are neither right nor wrong — they just exist. Accept the speaker’s feelings even if they are uncomfortable for you. They are just the speaker’s feelings and are as real and valuable as yours.
6. **Restate your message without repeating.** Translate what the other person has said into your own words. Restate the meaning without using the other person’s words and without being obvious. This gives the speaker assurance that you’ve heard and understood. At times this can be done without

SIMPLY STATED

1. Seek to understand first and to be understood second.
2. Match tempo and tone.
3. Listen TO, not against. Evaluate, do not value judge.
4. **Watch for:**
What will not be said.
Read:
Facial language.
Body language.
5. Grasp FEELINGS and CONTENT.
6. Restate WITHOUT REPEATING his or her words.

Here’s a way you can immediately begin to employ Active Listening. The next time you and another person have very strong opposing feelings about something you’d like to resolve, try this: sit down with that person and ask him or her to make a thirty to sixty second statement. Then, restate what was said until the other person agrees, “Yes, that’s what I was trying to communicate to you.” Then switch. Make a statement and have the other person restate it to your satisfaction. This way, each time one of you makes a statement, you’re absolutely certain that you’re understood by the other person. Continue making statements and switching. You’ll come very close (if not all the way) to a solution by quickly resolving strong feelings and understanding one point at a time. It’s truly amazing how people are willing to understand as soon as they feel understood.

Remember, the purpose of Active Listening is to assist the other person. If you don’t respect his or her right to be understood, you will fail.

words by a simple silent nod. At other times a question will help to clarify the speaker's message.

RISKS:

Being too obvious: Be subtle. Change the words while retaining the meaning. If someone says, "I'm having a terrible day," you might say, "Sounds like everything is going wrong."

Overdoing it: There are times when the appropriate response is not to actively listen. For example, if the situation calls for a decisive statement, a provocative challenge, or a non-negotiable, unpopular final answer, do what is right.

Watch for your ulterior motives: You may find yourself resorting to old patterns out of deep-seated learned responses. Be vigilant in evaluating whether you are actively listening or not.

Two major reasons why people do not listen:

1. They believe that by actively listening they are signaling agreement with the other person.

It is not required that you agree with the other person just because you listen — you can actively listen to a person without changing your viewpoint.

2. They are afraid the other person may cause them to change.

It is possible if you do active listening that the information you hear may cause you to change your viewpoint.

Earl Nightingale was right: "The effectiveness of your life is determined by the effectiveness of your communication." In your career, in your personal relationships, in every area of your life, effective communication is essential to success.

The three skills discussed here are powerful tools for improving communications. If you'll take the time and put forth the effort to learn them, they can change your life! For more information about these and other communications skills, or about resources for training in these techniques, please contact the authors.

CHRISTOPHER HEGARTY, author of best seller *HOW TO MANAGE YOUR BOSS* and management consultant to four hundred of the Fortune 500 companies, is an international award-winning public speaker and president of his own executive training firm.

CHARLOTTE B. MILLINER, internationally recognized trainer in NLP and related skills, and former apprentice to Dr. John Grinder, is founder and president of the Center for Professional Development.