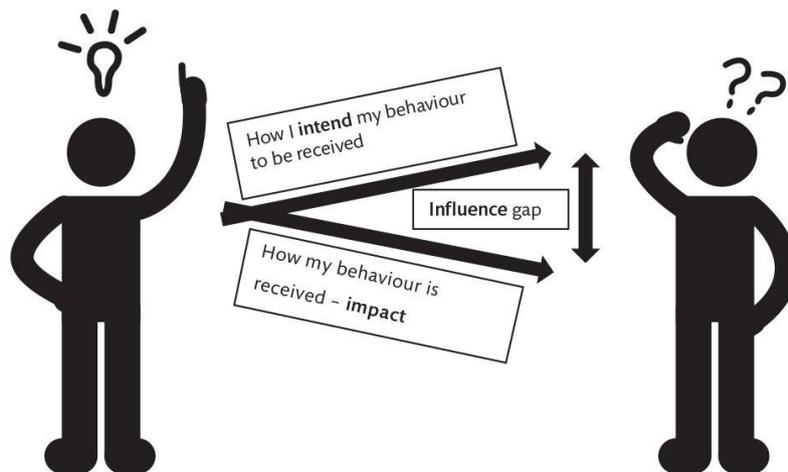


## The Rules of Rapport – published in ILM’s Edge Magazine Feb 2019

Few of us need to get on with everyone. But most of us would like to get on with some people better, particularly the people we work or live with – our boss, our work colleagues, and family members.

When we communicate with other people, we usually have a positive intention, but the way we come across can have a negative impact on them. This means they are less likely to go along with what we want – there is an influence gap between what we intended and what we achieved.



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If you know what is driving your behaviour and are aware of how you come across, you can adapt it if you want to. And if you can pick up cues from other people about what might be driving their behaviour, you can respond more appropriately. This is emotionally intelligent behaviour.

This article gives tips on what to do before, during and at the end of an interaction, to ensure that the impact you have matches your intention and you achieve the outcome you want.

### **Before**

#### Get yourself into the right mindset for the interaction.

Are you looking forward to it? What do you hope will happen? What do you want from the interaction? Thinking about these questions creates a vision of what you want, and the vision will shape what you say and how you say it.

#### Be mindful of how you are feeling – physically and emotionally.

Your feelings will have an impact on how you come across. If you are hungry, you might come across as irritable. If you are tired, you might come across as lethargic. If you are worried, you might come across as tense. Put this right before you communicate – have something to eat, take a walk, do some deep breathing. This will put you into a positive mood.

#### Banish negative thoughts

When we are nervous about something, we tend to have automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) and imagine the worst. Be aware of these and replace them with more realistic, logical and helpful thoughts. For example, if you are going for an interview, you might think “*they’ve already decided who they want*”. This thought will affect your behaviour and you will come across less confidently.

Replace it with the thought *“I’ve got as good a chance as anyone”* and you will feel more confident and have a more positive impact on the people in the interview.

### Start with the end in mind

Clarify your purpose for the communication. What is it you want to achieve? Why are you communicating? Keep your purpose in mind during the interaction. For example, you might decide to call your elderly mother who lives alone a distance away. You are calling to check she is ok and show you care about her. During the call, something comes up, you have a slight disagreement and you end the call with both of you feeling dissatisfied. If you had kept your purpose in mind, you might have dealt with the disagreement differently.

### Consider your audience

Put yourself in their shoes. If you were them, what concerns might you have? What might they want from the communication? What is their perspective on the issue? What might engage them?

How do you want them to feel when you communicate with them – bored, nervous, angry, confused? Or curious, confident, relaxed, clear? What will you need to do in the content and delivery of your message to elicit positive emotions in your audience?

## **During**

### Build rapport

When you meet someone, whether for the first time or someone you know well, it is worth spending time building rapport with them. Make eye contact, ask them how they are, what’s been happening. Show an interest in them and listen to the answers.

You can often tell if people are in rapport because their body language and speed and tone of voice will be similar. Match the other person’s energy, (but not so much that they think you are imitating them). If they speak quickly and appear animated, speed up your own speech. If they talk quietly and calmly, slow down. Matching in this way will increase the rapport between you and provide a sound basis for developing the relationship. A mismatch creates an obstacle to rapport.

### Pay attention to their response

Being alert to the reaction of someone to what you have said will show you whether they have received it as you intended. If their reaction surprises or puzzles you, this is an indication that they have not interpreted your communication in the way you intended. Ask them what they are thinking eg *“you look surprised, what are your thoughts about this?”*

Most people like talking about themselves, so ask some open questions to get the conversation going. Use questions beginning with *“What”* and *“How”* rather than *“Why”*, as the latter can make people respond defensively. Build on their answers to develop the conversation.

### Manage your mood

During the conversation, pay attention to your feelings. If you notice that you are starting to feel bored or tense or angry, take action to manage your mood – get up, walk around, change your speed and tone of voice, say something positive. Emotions are like ripples in a pond, and if you are feeling downbeat, it is likely that they are too.

We all feel frustrated sometimes when people don’t see things the way we do. Remind yourself that in most cases they are not deliberately being annoying – they are just being themselves. When you feel frustration (or other unhelpful emotions), take time out, count to 10, move away, pause before you speak – these buy you time to think and decide what to say or do.

### How to disagree

Conflicts can escalate quickly, as our flight or fight response is activated before a more considered response kicks in. When you disagree, avoid emotive language and personal attacks. Take the heat and pace out of the situation by using a calm tone of voice and measured body language – don't point, shout or wave your arms about.

Look for common ground on which to build agreement. When you disagree with what is said, use "And", not "But" to express your views eg "*and I think...*" not "*but I think...*". "But" is like a big red flag that you are about to disagree, while "*and*" defuses the potential conflict.

Most importantly, show respect for the other person, even when you disagree. People are particularly sensitive to a "lack of respect". When you communicate, bear in mind that we all have deep-seated needs to feel that we matter, are respected and are liked. So even during conflict, treat them as if they are important to you and you want to get on with them.

Move the conversation on to the future, and how to resolve the disagreement. Use phrases such as "*would you be willing to...*" in order to find areas of agreement on how to move forward.

### **At the end**

#### Leave-taking

At the end of the discussion, clarify any decisions or actions that you have agreed. You will usually want an ongoing relationship with the person, so take your leave on good terms if you can. Talk about when you will next meet and you may want to make notes for future reference.

### **Personality styles**

In addition to the general tips above, bear in mind that we tend to fall into a natural communication style when we interact with others, so there are also tips specific to each style.

Once you are aware of your own style, you can adapt it to achieve the impact and influence you want. And when you pick up cues from other people about their drives and stressors, you can respond more appropriately to their needs to connect with them and close the influence gap.

You can read about the four styles together with lots more tips for getting on with other people in *How to Get On with Anyone* by Catherine Stothart, published by Pearson.