



# Building rapport with team members

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

Getting to know your team members and establishing respectful, genuine partnerships with them is the foundation for open communication and effective performance management and development. Building rapport is about connecting with people at a personal level to create effective working relationships.

Understanding who they are, what their interests are and what are some of the things that are important to them in life. You don't necessarily have to become friends with your team members, but you should build relationships in which employees feel that you understand and value them beyond the outputs of their work.

While everyone is different, human beings are social animals and we spend a significant proportion of our lives at work. Building rapport with others is important for our collective job satisfaction and building a sustainable culture of performance where people feel engaged with their work and can realise their potential.

### KEY BENEFITS OF BUILDING RAPPORT

- It helps build a positive work environment and trust with your team members. When we trust each other we tend to work in a more straight-forward manner which contributes to productivity.
- It builds the kinds of relationships that support effective coaching – if people believe your assessment of their work is based on a genuine understanding of who they are, what strengths they bring to the workplace, and an interest in their well-being, they are more likely to ask for help and be open to feedback to enhance their performance.
- It can be personally satisfying to learn about your colleagues, where you may have common experiences or values, and what you can learn with them.

### WHEN TO BUILD RAPPORT

- When someone joins your team – investing additional time at the beginning of your working relationship with a new team member to really get to know them helps you establish the right kind of partnership from the outset.
- Everyday interactions – having collegiate conversations at the beginning/end of the day, over lunch or tea/coffee breaks, and when the right moment strikes will help to maintain a good rapport and connection with your team members. It also pays to build this approach into your interactions on the phone and e-mail. Thinking about the tone that you use and allowing for a personal element to your communication will help you maintain rapport with team members.



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- One-to-one meetings – allow some space in your regular one-to-one meetings to talk more broadly about what is going on in life at work and outside of work. This might feel like a challenge at times when your workload is heavy or when you are under pressure.
- Performance management and development reviews – showing that you are aware of someone's broader interests and responsibilities outside of their job during performance management and development reviews is a good way to demonstrate your overall consideration for them as a person.

### WAYS TO BUILD RAPPORT

You build rapport by interacting with your team members regularly and investing time to have conversations at a collegiate level. At a practical level, you will need to:

- Communicate regularly – It is important to speak with your team members regularly, sharing important information about what is happening in the organisation so they have an up-to-date context for their performance. If someone is away from the office (e.g. working remotely, on parental or extended leave) discuss with the team member what might be an appropriate level of contact so that they still feel part of the team.
- Ask questions – Asking open questions about what is going on for your team members is the starting point to building rapport. E.g. "How was your weekend?" This gives people space to share information about themselves. Closed questions i.e. where there is only a yes or no answer, don't open things up the same way. E.g. "Did you have a good weekend?"
- Listen to your team members - Pay attention when people talk of their sporting interests, hobbies, volunteering, weekend activities and other things outside work. Listen interactively. People like to feel heard and understood. If you reflect back what you hear about a team member's personal interests and then build on the conversation with follow up questions it helps you get beyond everyday chit-chat and learn more about them as a person. E.g. "How did you get into that?"
- Share some of yourself – You can't expect your team members to share things about themselves without you doing the same. The way you share things about what you are thinking and feeling about things at work, and your life outside of work will set the tone for how your team members open-up in return.
- Provide personal support - If someone tells you that they are going through a tough time in their personal life, help them by being available to listen, or by giving them extra support at work.
- Remember details - Ask people about things they have previously mentioned (e.g. how their child's party went or the menu for a dinner party). Remember, not everyone wants to bring up things they have told you, so follow cues from someone before raising a topic.



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- Accommodate individual differences - Everyone works in different ways and has different commitments and responsibilities outside of work. Accommodate each person's well-being and working style where appropriate and feasible. For example, schedule mid-morning meetings if a person's family commitments make it hard for them to arrive early.
- Show appreciation - Simply saying "thank you" when a team member does something for you to acknowledge their contribution can go a long way. This has even more impact when you recognise the effort they have put into a particular task and how their personal strengths or expertise made it valuable.
- Have fun and a laugh - While there is serious work to be done in everyone's job, it can be important to have some light relief now and then to keep things in perspective and maintain a human element to our work environment. There is space to do this within a professional and respectful work environment.

### KEY POINTS

- Everyone is different - For some people, building rapport comes more naturally than others and they are energised by these kinds of interactions. For others it may take more of a conscious effort to build rapport building into their daily work habits. Everyone will have their own style that feels right and "authentic" for them.
- It takes time and attention to build good rapport - it doesn't happen overnight and people naturally come to know one another better over time. You can't always push for it and you need to pay attention to the verbal and non-verbal signals you get from team members about how comfortable they are.
- Rapport needs ongoing investment to maintain - once you have established some rapport with others it doesn't look after itself. Trying to build it into your everyday interactions helps to make it a habitual activity and part of your managerial repertoire. If you let it drop off the radar, or damage it in some way, it can be tricky to rebuild and impact on how well you partner with someone on performance.