

READING MINDS

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WHAT IT ALL MEANS

The basis of all persuasive technique and mind control effects is rapport. This concept has been blown out of all proportion by gurus in the therapy and management training fields, but a basic understanding of what it means is worth having.

RAPPORT

Having rapport with somebody means that the two of you are enjoying easy company with each other, and usually implies that you are acting and talking in similar ways. I'm sure you've had the experience of getting on with somebody very quickly and soon finding that you both seem to know where the other is coming from. By contrast, we've all endured trying to hold a conversation with someone who just doesn't seem to click with anything we have to say.

Since the 1970s, rapport has been studied and turned into a high-powered 'skill' that supposedly can be learned and then turned on when a person wishes to gain persuasive influence over somebody. The theory works like this: people in rapport with each other tend to mirror each other's body language, use similar speech patterns and even breathe and blink at the same rate – the outward signs of a comfortable and free-flowing interaction.

Certainly this is true – if you shift position during a conversation with a friend, you'll find that he or she will soon follow to keep that unconscious rapport going. Similarly, you may be aware that you talk or act a little differently with one group of people than you do with another. You do this to allow what you have in common with each group to

flourish and so ensure that your rapport with them is maintained.

MIRRORING

However, the gurus in this field then say that, by consciously showing the outward signs of rapport – that is, by deliberately mirroring someone's body language and feeding back their vocabulary, ideas and breathing rate – you will automatically create rapport and really put the other person at ease. Despite its twisted logic, this sounds plausible – but, in practice, you are likely to appear less an easy conversational partner and more a person with a mental illness!

There's a good reason for this. When those outward signs normally occur, they are the signals that something unconscious and natural is occurring. Faking them just doesn't feel right to the other party and can be quite alienating.

SIGNALS

You don't need to take a training course in communication skills to be able to put someone at their ease. When a person meets you for the first time, they will be open to any signals you give them about who you are and how the two of you are going to relate – much as I tried to put you at your ease at the beginning of the video clip.

If you have already decided – perhaps unconsciously – that the person you are about to meet isn't going to like you, the chances are that you will give off signals that show an uneasy rapport and a presumption of dislike between you. Therefore you tend to get what you expect.

If, on the other hand, you walk into a situation having decided that you are immensely likeable and worth knowing (even if you have to fake it ...), you'll find, all other things being equal, that you get a better response. And then as more people respond well to you, you start to change your own opinions about yourself.

BEHAVIOUR

So, when approaching new acquaintances with whom you wish to establish rapport, decide beforehand that you are going to be very interested in them and what they have to say, and that you want them to feel comfortable and good. And *don't* fake it and *don't* overdo it! Smiling too much and touching a near-stranger's elbow all the time will make you seem like a moron, not a potential friend. People respond to natural, easy-going, confident behaviour.

And remember: if you do have to fake it and then fake it quite well, you are actually being that confident person in that situation. It's just behaviour!

PATTERNS

I develop that rapport by learning to see the situation from the perspective of the other person, not my own. Consider what happens in a normal conversation. Someone sits and talks about themselves, while you pick up on a few things that relate to you. You wait for them to finish so that you can say, 'Yes, I ...' and then start talking about yourself. They then responds by returning to their own stories and opinions, and so the dialogue continues. In other words, you are listening to someone to see how the conversation relates to you.

(DETTA ÄR GRYMT BRA:) Now consider the alternative: you listen to whatever they have to say to learn how the content of their conversation relates to *them*. You build in your mind a representation of their way of seeing the world, and you piece together their patterns. People love talking about themselves, so you can happily ask any questions to complete those patterns and gain more information about their world. After a while, this will become almost second nature to you, and you will be able simply to look at someone and tell almost immediately what their reactions to various stimuli might be.

MIND CONTROL?

Once you understand someone else's perception of a situation, you can mentally exist inside their heads. If they want you to sort out a problem for them, you can do so more effectively, for you are not letting your own prejudices and ideas get in the way.

It is from this starting point that I can begin to play with the mind control for which I am known. It's not that I am really controlling other people. Rather, I am seeing events through their eyes and second-guessing their responses and thoughts. It's great fun.