



Tearing Down the W.A.L.L.

The four keys to building rapport

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Emily, a sales manager in a large organization was having significant challenges with her team. As she continually struggled to motivate them, she realized that communication was stifled. Her team was regularly missing their monthly objectives and had failed to provide meaningful status updates. There was a wall between Emily and her team, and it was her responsibility to address it as quickly as possible.

The core issue that Emily was facing is all too common. Any time you are communicating with people, your ability to create rapport is key to your success. To determine whether you have it, ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Have you spent time building a relationship with your team members?
- 2) Do you know what they like, want and need at work and at home?

In Emily's case, the answer to both questions was no. She realized she had not really focused on developing relationships and was attempting to manage people with whom she had no relationship other than being "the boss."

Using four basic principles, Emily began focusing on building rapport with her team. Less than a month later, people who had been distant became engaged both personally and professionally, and overall team performance began to improve.

Taking the W.A.L.L.

Establishing strong rapport does not mean learning everything about your customer or employee's private lives, but rather showing

them that you care about them and what is important to them. By developing and maintaining focus on four key concepts, you can remove walls between you and other people. The WALL concept is an acronym for watch, ask, listen and learn.

Watch: When you enter into a rapport-building situation, use your observation skills to identify good conversation starters. If you are meeting someone in their home or office, take stock of the surroundings. Look at the items on their desk, pictures, awards or collectibles and use that as your opener. If the meeting is in your office, pay attention to what they are looking at, as this may be a potential conversation starter. Once engaged in conversation, observe their reactions so that you can guide the conversation in the most productive direction. Watch their gestures and changes over the course of the conversation to gauge how they are responding to you.

Ask: The most trustworthy way to create rapport is to ask questions. It shows that you have a genuine interest in the other person's wants, needs and interests. Drafting some preplanned questions frees you to focus more intently on the other person. They are more likely to open up to you if your questions

are genuine and specific to them. In building rapport, it is easy to slip into the "I" mode, turning the focus back on yourself. So remember that your objective is to get them into "I" mode. They should be doing most of the talking.

Listen: This is essential. Many professionals may ask all the right questions, but don't really listen to the answers. To be effective, your objective is to demonstrate that you understand the needs of your team members and care about what is in their best interest. If you are asking powerful questions and getting one-word answers in response, you're likely going down a track that the other person is not interested in pursuing. It is not unusual for someone to provide partial answers in an attempt to avoid complete disclosure. In many cases, the omitted information is what you really want to know. But if they are not yet comfortable sharing, make a mental note and find a way to come back to that point later in the discussion.

Learn: Building effective rapport is about trying things, watching and listening, observing the end result and learning from it so that you adjust your approach. Make a commitment to become an active student of rapport building. Become more aware of how others react to you. Try new approaches when encountering roadblocks. There is no single correct way to build rapport, so discover what works for you.

Observe any master of rapport, and you will see a person who has a keen awareness of their surroundings, including other people and how they react. Become a student of building rapport, and watch your team perform like never before. ★



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