

Pacing and Leading – The Engines of Strengthening Business Rapport

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Abstract

One could say that rapport is a natural and necessary phenomenon, but it is something that needs to be worked at. My approach focuses on the difference in the techniques/actions applied at gaining and losing rapport. The technique of rapport demonstrated that there are three variables used to differentiate stages in striving for achieving rapport:

Firstly, body language as non-verbal communication consists of kinesics and proxemics.

Secondly, matching voice and words covers characteristics of spoken language pointing to the individual's ability to develop the content of the communication through recurring sensory words.

Thirdly, mismatching strategies include negative chemistry, deliberate mismatching and other devices for breaking rapport.

The results of the research show that the two engines of strengthening rapport, namely pacing and leading, highly contribute to a desired outcome in conversation.

Key words: body language, breaking rapport, language matching, leading, pacing

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1. Introduction

The business model of communication involves two main techniques for enhancing rapport, namely *pacing present states* and *leading to desired states* in face-to-face interactions. In the verbal context, these instruments for facilitating effective communication help us connect with other people and create a favourable climate of rapport. Pacing involves matching the other person's map of the world, having the flexibility to go along with people's communication model through their own way of thinking, and in their own language. Leading is the process of changing the other person's map of the world in order to move closer to some desired outcome. It involves shifting to a new perspective and a new resourceful state, and in so doing subtly attempting to influence another person's orientation in the desired direction.

To put it differently, *pacing* is the process of establishing rapport through matching and *leading* is the process of changing your physiology, tone of voice, or choice of words to cause the other person to favourably change either his physiology or state (Ellerton, 2006).

In other words, to *pace* a client in a selling situation, we need to make reference to what he/she would most likely be *seeing, hearing, feeling* or *thinking*. For example, 'As you *look* closely at the *picture*...comfortably in the chair... and *listen* to my *voice*...bring the *sounds* of *waves* and *hear* the *songs* of whales into your bedroom...you can *sense the warmth* of the place...while you begin to *wonder*...' Words such as "and", "while" and "as" link the thoughts one with another, providing a continuous sensory experience. They also imply a *weak cause and effect*. This perspective is also shared by O'Connor (2001) who, referring to Meta Model Patterns, acknowledges that "Cause – effect links what is happening naturally (pacing) with the outcome you want (leading). The *cause-effect* is the *transition* between pacing and leading" (O'Connor, 2001, p.177). That is why, focusing on the ways of establishing human relations through rapport and respect, pacing and leading are worth taking into consideration. From a linguistic perspective, matching the clients' words, being attuned to their expressions and metaphors, using the same language cues (visual, auditory, kinesthetic patterns) is a confirmation of active listening and an attempt to build a more empowering desired state.

2. Theoretical background

As we pace a person's ongoing sensory experience, we start portraying everything in *artfully vague terms*, and while doing that, we start to *lead* him/her into downtime (Ellerton, 2006), begin to draw their attention to their internal experience. Alternatively, O'Connor notices that we can suggest *stronger cause and effect patterns* that slowly *lead* people deeper into trance with conjunctions that imply time, like "when", "during", "before" and "since": "*Before* you go into relaxed state, you may notice how easy it is to close your eyes *whenever* you wish to feel more comfortable and begin to think of somewhere you would like to set out...and *when* you are ready..." (O'Connor, 2001, p.179). Once we have gained a good level of rapport by pacing, we begin to lead and influence the other person.

This approach was continued by Molden and Hutchinson (2006) who remarked on the difference in the techniques/actions applied at gaining and losing rapport. After "matching the other person's unique perception, check if he is willing to follow you by changing your physiology and noticing what happens – if you have rapport they will follow you. If rapport is lost during leading, revert to pacing before continuing to lead to a desired outcome. The general view in NLP is that you need twice as much pacing as leading" (Molden and Hutchinson, 2006, p.59).

New attempts at distinguishing stages centred on how we could take the lead and start to move the other person to a different way of thinking/feeling/acting are offered by Cooper (2008, p.99) who synthesized 7 steps to lead someone to:

- Consider a new idea or proposal;
- Speed up the conversation;
- Hear and accept bad news;
- Slow down and think about something in more depth;
- Change the emotional state (for e.g., to move from anxious to calm);
- Accept and respect you for saying 'no' or delivering bad news;
- Change the other person's energy level.

However, there are similarities between Molden and Hutchinson' (2006) view and Cooper's (2008) view, who is also of the opinion that in order to start leading, one has to test out how much rapport they have established and notice whether their interlocutor follows: "[...] make changes to your breathing and movements if you want to change the other person's emotional state or pace. If the other person doesn't follow your lead when you test it out, *keep on matching and pacing*, test again and keep on going until you're confident you have enough rapport to lead" (Cooper, 2008, p.99).

Alder's research (2002) on the technique of rapport has also demonstrated that there are three variables used to differentiate stages in striving for achieving rapport. These are: *body language, matching voice and words, mismatching strategies*.

3. Body language as non-verbal communication

On the basis of the above set of criteria, Alder makes a classifications pointing out the following aspects:

Body language as non-verbal communication (NVC) consists of 2 main types:

a) kinesics and b) proxemics

a) *Kinesics* include *facial expressions* like smiles, frowns, narrowed eyes and scores of subtle expressions, transmitting emotions such as friendliness, anger, disbelief and sympathy. *Gestures* include finger-pointing, head-shaking, hand movements such as clasping, making a fist, facing one or both open palms upwards.

They can convey:

- agreement or disagreement
- focus and attention
- emphasis
- openness and honesty
- congratulations
- acceptance

Kinesic movements as part of the communication process include:

- pacing up and down
- strolling
- standing up
- clasping hands
- crossing legs
- folding and unfolding arms
- placing both hands palms down on a table

b) *Proxemics* involve:

Physical contact:

- shaking hands
- hugging
- patting
- mimicked, gentle punching
- ruffling the hair
- holding hands

Physical contact can intensify a communication, both positively and negatively. It can send various messages (often more powerfully than words):

- greetings
- friendship and warmth
- sympathy
- empathy
- insistence

Positioning includes:

- sitting close or at a distance
- the effect of physical barriers such as a desk
- orientation, including the direction of chairs (in a meeting/interview room) → denoting connotation of power and vulnerability respectively.

Posture includes:

- standing straight
- leaning (forward with both hands on a desk)
- lounging
- sitting upright, and so on.

According to Alder, this “plethora of body language suggests the kind of conversation and its tone, the level of formality or informality, and the general demeanour and emotion of the parties” (Alder, 2002, p. 89).

4. Matching voice and words

Linguistically, *matching voice and words* covers characteristics of spoken language such as voice tone and pitch, or speed of conversation.

a) *Language matching* emphasizes the individual’s ability to use the same sort of language, words and phrases, technical or specialized terms unique to their group. Raising people’s awareness of the power of matching, or likeness, is an important aspect of developing the content of the communication and the relationship itself in the degree to which they can concentrate on the complex mechanics of voice and language when in rapport. In this line of thinking, we tend to match words and phrases that reflect our sensory preference, but at the same time, identify the other person’s recurring sensory words.

The ‘visual’ person usually sees images, and their speech and voice reflect that experience:

‘I can *see* what you mean’.

‘I’ll give you the full *overview*’.

‘I’ll *paint* you a *picture*’.

‘Let’s *zoom in* on this’.

An ‘auditory’ person tends to talk more slowly, with a rich, precise, rhythmic voice tone. In conversation the auditory communicator will have the tendency to choose auditory words, such as:

‘I *hear* what you’re saying’.

‘That *rings a bell*’ / ‘That’s *clear* as a *bell*’.

‘*Sounds* ok to me’ / ‘This *rings* true for me’.

‘It’s *music* to my ears’ (someone’s words make you very happy or pleased).

A ‘kinesthetic’ person speaks slowly, intermittently and is immersed in a feeling. A kinesthetic communicator tends to use feeling words and phrases like:

'I know how you must *feel*'.
'This just *feels* right' / 'I have a *gut feeling*'.
'I *sense* you're right'.
'Let's *run* with this idea for a while'.
'You'd better *get your skates on*' (hurry up)
'Let's get a *handle* on things' / 'I *get the hang* of this now'.

Knowing how a person is communicating is very useful if you want to 'get on the same wavelength' and make your communication as effortless and effective as possible (Alder, 2002; Molden and Hutchinson, 2006).

Once we identify a dominant modality in people's speech, language will start to seem more understandable and predictable. By specifically listening to sensory predicates, we can improve specific objectives like winning a sale or succeeding in a negotiation (our purpose or outcome). It has been shown (Ferraro, 2006) that *gender and linguistic differences* can be frequently observed in the same speech community between men and women. Variations in language usage according to gender give rise to very different communication styles. According to Julia Wood (1994), American women talk for the purpose of *building and supplementing rapport* with others, whereas men use talk to assert themselves; women will often *match* experiences with others for the sake of showing understanding and empathy (e.g. 'I know how you feel'), whereas men *match* experiences for the sake of gaining attention (e.g. 'I can top that' - do better than that).

From an Neuro-Linguistic Programming perspective, sensory preference / gender difference is but one dimension of linguistic style. In Kerry Johnson's opinion, *verbal pacing (matching)* counts for "not forgetting to listen to key phrases and marked-out words" (1994, p.147). He associates the state of keeping up pacing with a neck-and-neck cross - country race where "there is usually a runner who sets the pace [...]. Rather, he is the person the rest of the runners strive to keep up with" (1994, pp.142-143).

Johnson enlarges upon the "Yes – But" versus "Yes – And" approaches which prove effective in any sales situation. He argues that "they can *lead* your client to greater commitment and to the point of making a sale [...] Understanding the *power of verbal and nonverbal pacing* gives you a lot of control over the momentum of your meeting" (Johnson, 1994, p.142). Thus, he reveals that the "Yes – And" approach is twice more effective than the "Yes – But" strategy used in resolving disagreements and that convincing the customer to buy from you a whole lot quicker becomes more easily attainable:

e.g. *Yes, I agree that it seems too expensive. And the reason for this is that we wish to keep up the high standard and maintain the quality of our products. Certainly, when better materials are put into a product like this one, spending a little more upfront will pay off in the long run. Higher quality is preferable to replacing it in three years, isn't it?*

Using the "Yes – And" approach preserves the customer's self-esteem and makes them feel smart and confident.

b) However, there are some general *ground rules* that may speed up the learning process of matching and prevent embarrassment and failure (Alder, 2002, pp. 91-92):

▶ *Don't exaggerate* – you shouldn't try to match what seem like extreme or unusual mannerisms or voice characteristics. Use your common sense.

▶ *Partial matching* – match a *type* of behaviour but in a different way: e.g. you can clasp your hands rather than fold your arms, or nod your head in time with the speed of a person's speech and level of animation.

▶ *Practise in a low-risk situation* – don't try out your matching skills in an important interview or critical negotiation.

▶ *Respond paralinguistically* – make feedback sounds all the time to indicate you understand what someone says: e.g. 'Ok', 'Yes', 'Uhuh', 'I see', 'Whew', and other sounds you understand colloquially. Such sounds also indicate annoyance or impatience (a wide range of communication nuances).

Note: Just as there are considerable verbal differences (modalities), which are usually well documented in structure and meaning, the universal vocal practice, also known as *paralinguistics*, aids rapport by letting the person know you follow their communication.

► *Stay in character* – to some degree, self-awareness forms part of the learning process as you move out of your mental map and start to experience the other person's map of the world.

5. Mismatched communication

Alder reminds us that there are 2 types of *mismatched communication*. The former is the so-called *negative chemistry*, and the latter a *deliberate, conscious behaviour mismatch*.

a) *Negative chemistry* translates as the absence of personal 'chemistry' and contains a range of expressions which will quash rapport in attempting to end a communication:

e.g. 'Somehow we *don't connect* as before'.

'We don't *hit it off*'. (we don't like each other)

'You operate in *different planes / in different dimensions*'.

'It seems to go in *at one ear* and *out at the other*'.

'I might as well *talk to the wall*'.

'Our conversation doesn't *flow* as easily as it does on other occasions'.

b) In addition to simple mismatching, another aspect which "guarantees" an icy, invisible barrier in communication deals with situations when we *may wish to mismatch deliberately*. Communication in the business environment requires not only an understanding of language but also the nonverbal messages (cues) of communication that are part of any speech community. The way that business people hold their bodies often communicates information about their social status, feelings of submissiveness, or desires to maintain social distance. In line with this, Ferraro also considers that, when communicating, "a person may stand over another person, kneel, or <<turn a cold shoulder>>. Postural cues constitute very effective signs of a person's inner state as well as his or her behavioural expectations of others (Ferraro, 2006, p.79).

Alder (2002) illustrates this by offering examples of nonverbal communication patterns (*mismatching strategies*) to choose from:

- stand up abruptly from a sitting conversation
- sit down from a standing position
- stop in the middle of a walking conversation
- go silent for a few moments
- look into the far distance
- blow your nose
- sharpen a pencil.

How we position ourselves when communicating is a mark of our willingness or unwillingness to converse at all.

Perhaps one of the most visible nonverbal message for purposeful mismatching is *silent language* (go silent for a few moments for no reason): the other person merely senses something wrong, can't prove anything (mindread), and they decide to end their monologue. Other devices for mismatching on purpose, and hence *breaking rapport* are:

► *Bring a communication to a close* – You may consider:

1. You have obtained your outcome (persuading or informing)

Useful phrase: 'Can we *clinch the deal* now with this final offer?'

2. You may decide to abort your outcome (you no longer want what you wanted)

Useful phrase: 'Either you give me 10%, or I *take my business elsewhere*'.

► *Redirect a conversation* – A fluid communication, based on a strong rapport, can take on any direction, pace or model (e.g. serious, jocular, or *laissez-faire*) that may not be in agreement with your beliefs or intentions. A quick and unexpected mismatch can bring the communication to a road junction from which you can then pace and lead to your communication outcome.

Useful phrases: 'Leaders are 'hands-off' and give very little guidance'.

'Projects can go off-track and deadlines can be missed'. (*laissez-faire* leadership: open, creative, co-operative)

► *Attract attention* – Strong rapport can involve a "downtime" state. In this state, we enjoy the process:

Useful phrases: '*Doesn't the time fly* when you're having long training workshops?'
'*We just talked and talked*' .

At the same time we may fail in pursuing the outcome of the communication. Alder (2002, p. 94) believes that when a sudden mismatch occurs, it "brings the other person into an *alert*, 'uptime' state in which you have their full attention. Use this device when you want to make an important point":

Useful phrases: '*So, I've given you enough time* to work out how you could manufacture on a large scale. I'd like to *have your commitment today*. I *strongly urge* you to consider preparing a business plan: the benefits are less waste, lower costs and greater productivity. If you give your support to this proposal, we can *start right away*. *The sooner* we act, *the sooner* we'll see the results'.

The steps used to help you attract attention and conclude your proposal convincingly are:

1. Summarize the benefits (ideally highlight 3 benefits)
(e.g. The benefits are *less waste*, *lower costs* and *greater productivity*).
2. End with a call for action
(e.g. I'd like to have *your commitment today* [...] If you give your support to this proposal, we can *start right away*).

► *Temporarily interrupt a communication* – This frequently happens by default, if a telephone rings or somebody pops up into your office, but you may wish to interrupt a communication for your own purposes, such as:

1. - to carry out an important brief task:
e.g. Jacqui, would you please *send* our contractors *an email* with the conclusions of our discussions *right away*, so we can *get their feedback by the end of this meeting?* And now we can get on with the next stage of the project.
2. - to allow a communication to have an effect on the other person by allowing them time to reflect and give them a sense of personal satisfaction:
e.g. I'm going to *let you handle this* for a while. *What do you say?* Would you like to *take full responsibility for this?* After all, you *get the business*, you *get the bonus!*

When people feel motivated by their job, this results in better quality work. Empowering people to work autonomously, giving them a financial incentive, and keeping them motivated is therefore a priority for managers and supervisors. Thus, by achieving a mismatch as if at a 'natural juncture' in the communication, you maintain rapport, and can carry on your communication where you left off.

6. Research methods and material

My research into the 'mysterious chemistry' process of rapport has led me to find the techniques of rapport-dynamics and consider that the common portal for experiencing the world is based on matching/mirroring back another person's linguistic, non-verbal and mental patterns, i.e. reflecting back language, gestures and attitudes.

The specific categories of words and phrases reflecting the dominant modality in speech were insisted on and adapted from real business situations such as winning a sale or succeeding in a negotiation.

I have discussed the necessity to listen to key phrases, recurring sensory words, technical or specialized terms, conjunctions that imply time (*verbal pacing*) before taking further steps to actually *lead* and influence the interlocutor. Moreover, the paper attempted to provide a 7-step synthesis to lead someone and the whole research was carried out following the 3 stages used to achieve rapport, i.e. body language, matching voice and words, mismatching communication.

In analyzing the two engines of strengthening business rapport, I could come up with two remarks. Firstly, pacing and leading can be considered important in business communication because they reduce the gap between us and our interlocutors. Secondly, by engaging themselves in a reciprocal matching-pacing-leading process, interlocutors check on the understanding of the other

person's map of the world and communicate from a position of knowledge.

In my analysis of both linguistic similarities and differences, I have been aware that people's dominant modalities in speech can lead to either gaining or losing rapport.

7. Findings

The findings indicate that, from a linguistic point of view, pacing involves having the flexibility to pick up and incorporate other people's vocabulary (their words and phrases) into one's own vocabulary. If somebody says 'I haven't got a good grasp on this situation', we might say 'I understand you need to get a handle on this. Let's go more deeply into it. How does that grab you?' In this way, we experience his/her model of the world, by communicating with them in their own language and through their own way of thinking. The article also shows that we need to understand a present state, i.e. to pace the other person, in order to build a more empowering desired state, i.e. to lead our interlocutor towards the outcome we want to achieve. Whether dealing with issues of selling or negotiating, the degree of success depends on how naturally the people involved can establish rapport.

8. Conclusions

This article aimed at giving an overview of the two engines of strengthening rapport, namely *pacing* and *leading*, which highly contribute to a desired outcome in conversation. The role of *matching* the other person's perception as well as changing their emotional state was pointed out. Both pacing and leading stand for matching harmoniously posture, energy and words at first, and then gradually enlarging the individual's model of the world. These three relevant stages, i.e. matching, pacing and leading, if well-balanced, contribute to the cognitive ability to make the other person more open to receiving our message.

The results show that once we make the *transition from pacing to leading* and gain a good level of rapport, we create a more favourable business context where gestures, kinesic movements, proxemics match and language begins to seem more predictable and understandable.

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