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## MAKING THE GATEKEEPER YOUR FRIEND

It's your first sales visit to the doctor's office, and you seem to have come at a bad time. The doctor is running late, patients are stacking up in the waiting room, and half a dozen competing reps are already lined up ahead of you for a minute of the doctor's attention. What do you do?

- A. You turn around and leave, and make a note to yourself to try again later.
- B. You drop your card and your samples with the receptionist and say you'll be back in a few weeks.
- C. You hang around and chat with the receptionist while you wait your turn.

If your answer is C, you've already learned one of the secrets of success in pharma sales.

Building a good relationship with the doctor's receptionist, office manager, or other gatekeepers may not get you special treatment or a shortcut to the head of the line this time. But remember—even though these people aren't writing prescriptions, they have the confidence of those who do, and control your access to them. They can be difficult obstacles, or your greatest allies. Making them your friends is an investment that can pay off big in the long run.

And how do you make friends with the gatekeepers? You start by building **rapport**: a sense of harmony and mutual affinity that creates an **atmosphere of trust, confidence, and cooperation**.

### STEPS TO BUILDING RAPPORT

Rapport is fundamentally based on people's perception of sameness. On a conscious level this can involve elements like a perception of common interests, shared values, and the like. Even more important, however, in establishing the tone of an interaction, are the unconscious aspects—the behavioral and verbal signals that *by themselves* can create the emotional state you want to foster, or undermine it past salvaging. By purposefully controlling these signals, you can significantly improve the quality of your interactions with people.

**Mirroring.** People in rapport adopt the same physical posture and mannerisms. They lean closer and draw apart in synch with each other, they cross their legs in mirror-image, they reach for their drinks at the same time.

The power of this technique is that it offers a person a reflection of their own behavior, which they almost always react to positively. In contrast, it is difficult to hold a conversation with someone whose body language is very different from yours, and the result is often discomfort and a lack of connection.

**Matching.** This extends the principle of mirroring in a more subtle way, by offering the other person movements and gestures that are similar enough to create the feeling of connection you

want, but different enough that the other person won't feel you are mimicking them. If they are tapping their fingers, for instance, you could tap your pen, or your foot.

Mirroring and matching don't stop with gestures. You should try to match their voice pattern too. Are they speaking quickly or slowly? Loudly or softly? Match the rhythm, tone, pitch, and volume of their voice as closely as possible, so they can hear and recognize the comfortable similarity to their own.

You can even match their breathing pattern. This is a very powerful physical cue that works directly on the emotions, to which most people are not consciously attuned. When you breathe the same way as someone, it creates a feeling of trust and understanding.

**Don't be a mimic.** When people are in deep rapport, mirroring and matching happen automatically, and the effect is as rhythmic and smooth-flowing as a dance. It is important to replicate that state of harmony without awkwardness or exaggeration. Be subtle: less is more.

A well-disposed gatekeeper can be your most valuable ally. Making the effort can pay off!

