How to build rapport

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**SPEAKERS**

Zoe Hawkins, Jo Wheatley

**Jo Wheatley** 00:03

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers,

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:10

people who are passionate about helping others to find alignment in their lives through coaching, and do a thinking of training and developing as a coach.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:19

Hello, and welcome to the Coaching Crows podcast with me, Jo Wheatley, and my friend and co host, Zoe Hawkins.

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:25

Hi, everybody, good to be back again. And this week, we are talking about how to build rapport, because rapport is a really important part of the coaching, connection and the relationship that you build with your clients. And we often have questions around things like how much of yourself do you share with your client? And, you know, how is the best way to build the relationships? So we thought we would share our thoughts and experiences on rapport building. So where would you like to start Jo?

**Jo Wheatley** 00:52

I think I want to start with this is something that you need to be conscious and intentional about. And you need to be prepared to unlearn and relearn how to build rapport in a healthy way. Because, you know, each of us through our lives have learned how to build relationships with other people. But we've probably done that in an unconscious way. And we need to remember that we are entering into it as a coach, we're entering into a professional relationship with another person for a service that we've contracted with them for an each and every individual is different. But part of the coaching competency framework that we work under as ethical coaches requires us to build rapport with our clients in order to build a safe, and enabling relationship with

**Zoe Hawkins** 01:48

them. Yeah, and rapport happens in lots of different places in the coaching connection, doesn't it? And for many people, that will be the chemistry conversation, but I believe building rapport actually starts way before that, things like this, for example, this podcast that you're listening to, our regular listeners have a sense of, of knowing after familiarity. And in many ways, this does build rapport with, you know, potential clients way before they step into any of our containers, be at coaching, training, or business lounge or, or emotions coaching, practitioner training, you know, so, you know, I think the way that you market yourself, the presence that you may or may not have on social media will influence how you build rapport with your clients. So if you're very active on social media, and you share a lot of your, your story on Instagram, or Facebook, or LinkedIn, or wherever it might be, then your clients are likely to come from that world and have a sense of who you are and how you work. Whereas if you're somebody who's more private, and perhaps you market your business in a different way, or you build connections in a different way, when you come to have those sort of first encounters with potential clients, you're coming in probably more cold. And so you'll need to think differently around how you build rapport. And then of course, you won't actually know, like, Does my client have a sense of who I am? Have they been in my world, have they not? So there's those things to factor in, as well. So I think that, you know, social media can be very helpful in warming clients up in terms of relationship. But we can equally not take anything for granted.

**Jo Wheatley** 03:26

Here rapport can come from like the other, or not obvious things like how long it takes you to respond to your clients initial inquiry to you? Are you somebody that responds within a couple of hours or instantly? If you see it, are you somebody that may take a week to respond to them? And it depends on what the client's expectations are around the coaching relationship. And, you know, in those early stages, you're giving early indications about expectations that you can have of each other within that relationship. When it comes to the chemistry conversation that you mentioned. Obviously, it's a relationship of equals. You're occupying different roles, but you are equals. It's not a friendship. So it can be friendly and warm. But it isn't a friendship is a different type of relationship. So in that chemistry conversation you're exploring, how do you like to work as individuals in that space? What are your expectations, and letting the other person know what it is that you need in relationship now the client may have a high level of understanding about their needs, or they might be at the beginning of their journey, about their needs in relationship with other people. And if they are coming to coaching because they've got challenges in some of their relationships, and that some of the areas that they want to work on, you might find that some of that shows up within that relationship, but rapport is built through tone of voice. It's built through body language, as well as obviously the words that we use and it would be very easy for an interview to say, when the client is sharing their story with you about what's brought them to coaching, I totally understand, you know, oh, yeah, I've had that experience as well. Because that is often how relationships are built outside of a coaching sphere is we'd like to have had shared experiences with other people. But in the coaching space, our role is to be, it's to be the champion of our client, but it's also to be objective, it's about being non judgmental, but at the same time, being able to give that sense of create that sense of warmth and safety.

**Zoe Hawkins** 05:37

I think you build rapport through curiosity, you know, and, you know, coaching, in many sense builds rapport by nature. So through very deep listening, listening, as you've described their job about what is being said, as well as what isn't being said, showing interest in what your client is sharing and an objective and neutral way. It's about inquiring deeper into the client's specific stories, challenges, whatever they might be bringing. And it's about being clear on how you can support through coaching. And you do need to unlearn many of the typical ways that you would build rapport, as you've described that Yes, me too. That's one to avoid oversharing stories around where you have had similar instances, in some places, I think it can be helpful to talk about the experience that you've had, but I think that's in your marketing. And in your leader, like, when people are choosing a coach, they will often choose based on things that resonate with them, like there are lots of coaches available. So what is it that's going to stand out and resonate with the client who wants to choose to work with you. And that might be a bit about your story. But your story doesn't come into the coaching relationship and the coaching scenario. And I would also say it's okay to make mistakes. So sometimes when you're working with a client, and they share something, and perhaps it's like the first 10 minutes or five minutes of a coaching conversation, where it's more informal, and you're doing a hi, how are you, how's your weekend been sort of check in, and you share something, and sometimes you can sense, ah, shouldn't have shared that, like, you might have said something like, I had an amazing weekend with my partner, and it was lovely, and then your client might share that they've just split up with their partner. And that's all they can think about. So you do need to just have a real awareness around the ability to calibrate that if and when you share personal stuff about yourself, how does that influence the rapport that you have with your client. And I would say my rapport building is very stripped back on my life. And who I am, I talk about who I am, in a sense of who I am, as a coach, my style of coaching, or how I like to work with clients, I will rarely talk about family or, you know, things that are happening beyond the occasional I've got a holiday planned if the client is asking, you know, those sorts of things. But there are clients that I maybe worked with for a number of years, who will naturally just know more about who I am, and, and more about the life that I lead, but that's been developed over a much longer period of time,

**Jo Wheatley** 08:17

you know, we often talk about building rapport and also the kind of the phases of rapport and when to when it is useful in the coaching relationship to actually test the edges, you know, kind of like to push that relationship around challenge, but that's very much dependent, going back to the chemistry conversation, really, and what you've contracted, therefore, in the individual session, or with the programme, overall, you know, to what degree does your client want to be challenged, and that that's a decision that you've got to kind of make and judge in, in that moment around calibrating the rapport and the safety in that container with also what they want to achieve. And that's where asking permission really helps to safeguard and also to deepen the level of rapport that that you have. So asking your client, so can I share an observation it might be, might be a bit challenging, and the client can then zoom? I don't know, if I'm ready for that, or, Yes, go on. You know, that's, that's what I want you to do. So rapport is something that needs to, you need to pay attention to, throughout every minute, really, of the coaching conversations that you have. It's funny, as I think about rapport and certain clients, like I was actually having a client session just this week, and we were halfway through a session and an alarm is going off in my house. And part of me then when I hear it is like, oh gosh,

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:51

I need to pause this session and go and deal with whatever is happening at the same time. I'm like, Can I Can I just push through and ignore it and keep working with my client. And those moments, you know, of course, they could break rapport, you know, my client is there in the session, it's their time. And interruptions are often unwelcome when you paying for a particular service. And yet at the same time, we are all human. And so you have to bring that human element. So I think, when you build rapport and rapport, strong, unexpected things are going to happen mid session, and maybe I don't know, your dog starts barking in the background at the postman that's walking by, or something. So I think building strong rapport, and also really noticing where your report is that and if things happen, and you sense that that did damage the report is to purposefully pay attention to that and repair it by, you know, seeking curiosity again, and understanding and making sure that you're back on the same page. So you know, it's not that we're saying you work in this purist container, where, you know, report is, is beautiful, and easy and perfect, actually, you know, in coaching, as to human beings, there are going to be times when that report is tested, and you'll need to work to bring things back on track.

**Jo Wheatley** 11:17

And if you are interrupted in the ways that you described, then you can repair it by offering to add additional time onto the end of the session to make up for the time that you were interrupted. And if that works for the client on that day, they may be happy for that, or that might not be my so with that, let's take some time on to the next session. And that's a nice gesture, for me fundamental to rapport is transparency, your transparency around what you're experiencing, as the coach, you know, that curiosity and asking, you know, for transparency from the client around what's happening for them, and what their experience is of the session of the relationship, the progress that they're making, you know, whether it's meeting their expectations, anything that they don't understand, you know, rather than then getting into a people pleasing dynamic within it, I think it's having that transparency and authenticity in the relationship is really fundamental. So creating a space where the client can say, Sure, I just, I don't even know how to answer any of these questions today, you know, I'm exhausted, and then further coach to just be able to sense into the needs of the client and use that to influence you to really channel the client for that to influence how you then respond and engage with the client. And that may be a case of you just hold holding pause and silence for a bit of time not feeling the need to verbally respond to your client. Because it just sensing that they just need to be able to breathe and have some space, or whether you you're channelling and you choose to respond with a Shall we start there. So it's about, you know, the energy matching as much as it is, you know, with the words and the questions and the responses to it. And, again, that's about matching their energy, but also raising the energy sometimes you know, if that's what the client needs, or bringing the energy down, if that's in service of what the client is asked for, within that session. So again, lots of micro noticing and checking and tuning.

**Zoe Hawkins** 13:21

I think also, when you look at rapport with your clients, it's worth looking across the breadth of the clients that you hold and bringing curiosity to any patterns of rapport that you're seeing. And supervision is a great place to explore the relationships that are forming or have formed with your client through a rapport lens. So you might find, for example, with one client, you're particularly jovial, jokey, light hearted, and yet with another client, you're more concerned about their coaching outcomes and their goals and to bring curiosity to what is that about, you know, because there may be there's some attachments forming in different relationships or pattern starting to form, and you're actually falling out of objectivity, in relationship with your clients. So I think supervision is a really important part of your rapport building skills, and your reflective practice skills to be able to notice what is happening with a client at any particular point in time.

**Jo Wheatley** 14:19

I want to bring another lens as well as occurred to me as we've been talking, and it's also prompted by a training session that we had last night on our coaching qualification, it's actually about values the session last night, but what popped up for me, then it's about the relationship with ourselves. So when we talk about rapport, we were thinking about it in the rapport between coach and coachee. And what about the rapport that you have with yourself, you know, your your inner champion or your inner saboteur or if you want to look at it in terms of the different personalities or parts of your personality that you have. So as a coach, I think, whether you call it ground Doing are just really tuning into how am I in rapport with myself today? What sort of what am I doing actively to nurture that rapport, that inner alignment that I have? And what about helping your client to explore? To, you know, how are they in rapport with themselves, you know, how are they in relationship in their own inner world. And I think that often opens, you know, a window or a door for the client into some of that deeper transformational work. And that recognition that we can give to the client that we know that that exists, and that there are things happening, can again, enable the report to really drop down deeper into another level.

**Zoe Hawkins** 15:42

Yeah, and I think building on that, essentially, what we're doing is helping our clients to get into rapport with themselves, right, and be able to notice what is happening within them and the different situations and scenarios that they find themselves in as they navigate their own lives. And, you know, and outcomes that they're looking for, from coaching. So I guess what we're saying is like, there's no one way to build rapport with a client, there are obviously skills that you use, as Joe said, tone of voice, energy management, making sure that you are matching your client's language and pace as much as you can bring in curiosity, deep listening, and making sure you pay attention to report throughout the coaching relationship, not just in the early days, where you're building the relationship, and of course, that unlearning that we talked about. And ultimately, I think the more experienced you become as a coach, and the more clients that you work with, that the more skills you will build naturally through being able to build these helpful, objective, safe, psychologically safe places where clients can do the work that they need to do to be able to achieve their outcomes and

**Jo Wheatley** 16:50

goals, you know, thinking about like a dashboard on a car. And thinking about rapport as being one of those dials that you look at, you know, in terms of the measurements around the relationship, because it's not all about, you know, has the client achieved their goal, that's not the only measurement of success in a coaching relationship. The level of rapport is one of those indicators, just to keep, you know, looking at when you're driving along, you don't look at your dials all the time, your speed all the time, but you are regularly looking at them. And I think one of the ways that we build, not just build it, but nurture it, and maintain it, because you can build it, but then if you let it go, they'll see that rapport can can drop off, but it's around consistency, so it's around congruency. And, you know, we talked about in the beginning, though, was how people get to know you through your website, or your online presence, or how they've met when they've met you regularly at an in person networking event, and so on. Or even the recommendation that somebody else has, has given of us of how they've described their experience with you, it's about when they then meet you in person. So they have that same experience that they thought that they were going to have. And you can be that point of consistency in an individual's life. So when clients are coming, and they've got very busy, professional and personal lives, and then you are consistently there, you know, as that kind of blank canvas if you like, and that you are able to maintain that level of peace and calm. It's like a little oasis for our clients, where they can immediately feel safe, accepted that they belong. And that can then really, I think, for me anyway, I suppose one of the best signs of rapport is when words are not needed at all. It's just being able to be together.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:41

Yeah, and where you can be yourself, you know, without any of the bells and whistles and I was with a client this week, we'd been doing some work on values, and they wrote some stuff, you know, around what they needed. And then this person was looking back on that, and saw themselves through a different lens. And was surprised, I think at what they had written, but didn't need to censor that for me. You know, because it was what it was, it was written when it was written, that was a moment in time where the client experienced it. I knew it didn't define my client and my client felt safe to be able to be their whole self, you know exactly how they are in that moment. And I think that is a huge gift that you can give. And I think as coaches what we do through report is essentially invite our client to be their best self, because they are safe, they can step into their adult, they can share what they need to share. And it's from that place that they're able to access all of their resources, all of their gifts, all of their talents and think clearly about what they want to gain through through the coaching relationship. So, you know rapport is quite little secret weapon really when it comes to coaching.

**Jo Wheatley** 20:02

Yeah. And also in a way through the other lens of the coaches, it's one of the things that sustains us to work with a number of clients. Now, learning also sustains me. So even if I'm working with a client, and I feel like this wrap up this, we have a rapport, but it feels very different to what I experienced with other clients, the learning I get from that the reflection or taking into supervision, you know, that also sustains me. So I see rapport as being able to serve us as coaches. Because we all as human beings need human contact, we need to be in relationship with others. And rapport, I think is, is one representation of recognition. When you're in rapport you're recognising each other and recognition is is one of our fundamental, basic human needs. So yeah, it really is a gift to both the coach and the coachee.

**Zoe Hawkins** 21:00

Absolutely. So if you've been inspired by our chat today, in looking at your own rapport building skills, you might want to come and join us in one of our trainings, either our coaching trainings for people aspiring to be a coach, or if you're a coach already our emotions coaching practitioner training, and you can find details of both of those where we've got programmes opening throughout the year on our website, IG company.co.uk. Thank you for listening to the coaching crowd podcast with Zoe Hawkins and Jo Wheatley. We'd love for you to join our inclusive community to learn and grow in the coaching space. Go over to Facebook and search for the coaching crowd to be in good company with other aspiring coaches.