



## Make the right connection with your boss

**Are you on the same wavelength as your supervisors and other key decision-makers in your company? If you want to find out, with a little practice you can use a mirroring technique from psychology as a quick, simple tool.**

**Mirroring** is an ideal solution for creating successful communication. According to the theory of Neurolinguistic programming, mirroring is when a person reacts to the behavior of their conversational partner by absorbing their perspective and then reflecting back what they have understood. In other words: The person repeats back what they have heard from their partner, thinking about both content and emotions, in their own words, after which their partner does the same. You may have already read about the technique in an advice book for job interviews, or maybe for flirting and dating advice. In the following sections, I'm going to briefly explain to you how the technique works.

### 1. The right attitude and the right conditions

The first requirement for building a good contact is having the right **attitude**. You need to be ready to listen actively to your conversational partner. This sounds logical, but it isn't always easy. You can only be on the right wavelength if you don't let your thoughts stray, and if you've already thought out what you want to say in the next pause in conversation.

If possible, select a **quiet environment** if you want to have an important discussion, and be sure you won't be interrupted. Ask yourself how many misunderstandings you've seen in the past because technical interference (e.g. cell phone reception) or environmental interruptions (e.g. loud surroundings) made communication more difficult?

### 2. Reflect physical expressions

The first step is to open yourself up physically to your conversational partner. This signals your partner that he has your attention. You can use your gestures and facial expressions, for instance nodding or using approving expressions like “mmh” or “aha” to signal you're still listening. At the same time, begin to mirror what you perceive on the physical level. Begin to **mirror physical posture**. This means that you will sit down or stand up – after a brief delay – in the same manner as your conversational partner does. You can also note **gestures** that stand out, then use the same ones. If you use the exact same movements, this is called direct mirroring in NLP. “Cross pacing” is a bit more challenging. In cross pacing, you mirror using a different action than the one you observed, e.g. using your breathing to mirror a foot moving back and forth. Besides posture, you can also use your voice to mirror others. You can speak in the same volume, tempo, and with the same emphasis. If you notice specific **expressions**, note them so you can integrate them into your own speech through paraphrasing.

### 3. Paraphrasing (repeating content)

After you practice active listening, you will use paraphrasing to understand what has been said. If your boss tells you, for instance, that he's worried about the development of a project, try to

put yourself in his shoes – even if you don't think his arguments are convincing. Mirror by repeating what you've heard in your own words – without your own opinion coming into play. You are only concerned with understanding your conversational partner. Start your sentences with

- "... If I understand you correctly, then that means..."
- "... So you mean..."
- "... In your opinion..."
- "...You believe that..."

When you do this, use key expressions your partner has used. However, you should avoid word-for-word quotes. This won't seem like understanding, it will just seem unnatural!

#### 4. Addressing and expressing feelings

Now you can go a step further. If you believe that you have correctly understood how your supervisor is feeling, you should summarize his feelings in words. You may need to do this very carefully and cautiously, depending on who you're talking to and what you're talking about. In psychology, this step is called verbalizing external emotions. Here are some examples:

- "...So you're afraid that..."
- "...You are disappointed that..."
- "...You're worried because..."
- "...You feel unsure whether..."
- "...You are annoyed that..."

Even if you believe that your discussion partner's feelings are entirely obvious, your partner will feel more calm and will feel a greater sense of trust if he believes others understand him. **Recognizing** another person's **feelings** is a key step in your goal of building a bridge to your conversational partner. You'll be showing your boss that you're listening attentively. In many cases, this alone is all you need to build a good relationship. At the same time, you will be distinguishing yourself in a positive manner from others around him.

You'll be able to avoid **misunderstandings** before they even arise. It's something you've likely experienced before yourself: disagreements and conflicts start with simple misunderstandings. By repeating what others say to you in your own words, you will avoid a large number of these misunderstandings, both small and large.

One other **benefit** is that you will gain **time** for yourself **to think** and consider your answers. This will help you avoid giving impulsive or hasty answers. It might sound simple, but this is how psychology works!

#### 5. Mirroring test

With these three steps, you've already achieved your goal of mirroring your communication partner. Your partner should now be automatically inclined to "mirror back" towards you, or give

you feedback that you've understood him correctly. No matter whether you agree with what he's said in full, in part, or not at all, you've "broken the ice" and laid the foundation for a good discussion by building a good relationship. Now, your partner should be open for a specific discussion on this topic or another matter. Without being hypocritical, lying, or bending over backwards, you've made it clear that you understand him. The two of you have built a trusting relationship based on successful communication, also called a rapport.

### **Be careful of manipulation**

Mirroring requires a high level of empathetic skill, and the ability to deal with others in a sensitive manner. Carl Rogers, its founder, emphasizes empathy, authenticity, appreciation, and congruity – consistent and predictable behavior based on the respect you have for your conversational partner. Don't confuse mirroring for the purpose of establishing conflict or strengthening relationships with manipulation!

I've often seen people who can mirror others almost perfectly without being conscious of what they're doing. They can get along with anyone! Others don't mirror at all, and find it difficult to approach other people. It doesn't have to be like this, since mirroring is something you can practice in everyday communication. Make it your goal to mirror one different person each day in the first week. Increase this to two people in the second week, then build from there. With a little training, the number of people you can "pick up on" will grow all on its own.