

EPISODE 88: HOW TO APOLOGIZE

1. AVOID PSEUDO-APOLOGIES

- The apology of expedience: “All right, I’m sorry. Now can I watch the game?”
- The absence of malice apology: “I wasn’t trying to hurt you.”
- Non-responsible apology: “I’m sorry this whole thing happened.”
- Burial apology: “Let’s just forget it.”
- The bigger-picture apology: “We’ve got more important things to worry about than this.”
- The blame-shifting apology: “I didn’t know you’d be so sensitive.”
- The trivializing apology: “What’s the big deal? I’m sorry.”
- Notice: You can actually use the words “I’m sorry” without apologizing.

2. EXPRESS REGRET

- Recognize the others person’s feelings and the hurt that you caused.

3. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

- “Humans are wired for defensiveness. And it’s very hard for us to take clear and direct responsibility for specific things we have said or done – or not said or done – without a hint of blaming, obfuscation, excuse-making [or] bringing up the other person’s crime sheet.” Psychologist Harriet Lerner: *Why Won’t You Apologize?: Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts*
- Blaming: “The reason I did that is because YOU...”
- Obfuscation: “to be evasive, unclear, or confusing.” Apologizing while avoiding liability: “I have no recollection of the account you describe, but if any of my actions indirectly contributed to your negative feelings I deeply regret anything I may or may not have done...”
- Excuse-making: “I’m sorry BUT...”
- The other person’s crime sheet: “While we’re on the subject of faults...”
- Does “Take Responsibility” mean it’s all your fault? No. It means to identify the part that is your fault and own up to it.
- Apologize for the attitude behind the action: “I’m sorry I disrespected you” not “I’m sorry I used that word.”

4. SUGGEST A REMEDY

- Talk is cheap.
- A willingness to change shows true remorse or concern.

5. FINISH STRONG

- Should you ask for forgiveness?

- *“It takes a while for an apology to sink in; you have to leave the person room to get over feeling angry with you for the hurt. Besides, asking for forgiveness demands something of the other person -- that he or she immediately exonerate you by putting an end to your feelings of guilt and shame. By asking for forgiveness, you once again shift responsibility off your own shoulders.”* Clinical psychologist Joseph Burgo, PhD

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