



There are so many ways to apologise. It's a wonder why people seldom use them. **By BARTON Goldsmith**

The Art of APPOLOGY

For some reason certain individuals refuse to say they are sorry for anything. It is as though they were giving up the deed to their house. I shake my head in disbelief that something so simple and so helpful to business relationships can be so underutilised.

You'd think that we only have a limited number of "I'm sorry[s]" in our vocabulary. Last time I checked it was next to impossible to run out of words. Why, then, is this healing phrase so limited?

For many people it seems as though saying, "I'm sorry," is akin to saying, "I'm wrong." Mistakes are human and when one makes an error, which unintentionally injures another, the polite thing to do is to apologise. Look, if you stepped on a stranger's toe, you'd say, "Oops, I'm so sorry," but if you say or do something that rubs your teammate the wrong way are you as forthcoming with offering amends?

Attitude is vital

Usually, it's not the fact that a person is unwilling or unable to apologise, it's the attitude that goes with it. Dealing with a person who has to be right all the time can be burdensome — for both parties. Confronting the unapologetic individual's insecurity or pride in a non-threatening way may prove to be helpful in having him or her recognise this uncomfortable behaviour pattern.

Saying something like, "Have you ever noticed that saying 'I'm sorry' is a bit difficult for you?" can begin to shed some light on the issue.

The problem with not being able to express remorse to a team-mate is that they will start to feel that you don't care about them. Trust me, we all say and do stupid things [I personally have a Masters degree in this]. If we are unwilling to show that we regret inappropriate behaviour it reflects poorly on our values as a person and as a team member.

There are numerous ways to express your heart-felt sorrow without grovelling or making you feel that you are compromising your integrity. Here are a few fun phrases that can help you say what you mean without feeling like a complete idiot.

- "Sorry, for a moment I was taken over by aliens."
- "I don't know what I was thinking, my brain froze. I apologise."
- "Oops — didn't mean it that way. Sorry."
- "We're getting on the wrong track. Let's start over here."
- "What I said was inappropriate, let me apologise."

When you are angry your body releases chemicals that may cause you to react in ways that can be destructive to you, your team-mates and your business.

past problems talk about them at another time.

6 Don't avoid your anger. If you stuff your feelings long enough you will explode and say or do things that you will regret. Anger does not diminish respect, you can be angry with those you respect, if you do it with respect.

7 Create a process for resolving problems without anger.

Arguments in the workplace

Everyone argues. Some of us do it overtly by yelling, while others do it covertly by avoiding contact and conversation. Whatever the method, the result is the same — hurt feelings and loss of productivity. Here are my tips to help you argue constructively. If this is done correctly it can be a pathway to growth, problem solving and higher profits.

1 Understand that anger itself is not destructive. There is a vast difference between anger and rage. When someone is angry they need to state their feelings, they don't break things, quit or end business [or, personal] relationships — that is rageful behaviour.

2 Talk about your feelings before you get angry. When you or your teammates can approach the situation as it happens and deal with it in a safe manner, it may not get to the point of being an argument. Sometimes, things just need to be verbalised and most arguments can be avoided if your associates understand how you feel.

3 Don't raise your voice. It's amazing how issues of hurt feelings or differences can be resolved with a whisper. I counsel people who are yellors to only communicate with a whisper and it greatly reduces the anger factor in their communication.

4 Don't threaten team members and don't take every argument as a threat to your job. This type of emotional blackmail puts the other person in a panic/flight or flight-mode. While you're telling them you want to leave, they may be making plans to find another job. In addition, they may be so devastated by the thought of losing their position that they can go into a deep depression and be unable to do their work.

5 Don't stockpile. This is where you bring up issues from the past to use as a hammer against whatever problem your team-mate has presented. Deal with their issue first and if you really have unresolved feelings from

Start by each person taking five minutes to state his or her feelings, or take a 20-minute break to think about things and come back to the table for another 10 minutes to discuss how you think you can best deal with the problem. Also, know that it's okay if the problem doesn't get solved right away.

8 Abuse is never allowed. This includes verbal abuse, any type of violence including slamming doors, breaking plates or hitting. If your arguments escalate to this level you need to leave the office. If one person ever hits another a police report needs to be made and an appointment with a therapist is mandatory.

9 Don't engage. Remember that negative attention is still attention. If a person tries to goad you into an argument, simply don't go there. Some people actually like to argue because it gives them a temporary feeling of power and gratification. Avoid being sucked into their need for attention.

10 Listen to your body. When you are angry your body releases chemicals that may cause you to react in ways that can be destructive to you, your team-mates and your business. Learn to understand your feelings and how the process of anger affects you physically and emotionally.

My research has shown that team-mates who argue more than 20 per cent of the time are probably not going to survive.

Try consciously to get your arguments under control and reduce the level of negative energy in these arguments. If not, and if you want to keep your business in good shape, you need to seek some issue resolution training.

Stay Well

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