



The Lost Art of Apology

THE INDEPENDENT FORUM FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE

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Happy Valentine's Day!

This month, we turn our attention toward the most basic aspect of relationships – relating. Many relationships fail simply because people lack the skills of relating. We're spending the month looking at ways to improve our relationships by improving our relating skills. We began by exploring "what we want" ([click here](#) to read the "What do you want?" newsletter) and how what we want impacts our relationships. We then turn our attention to learning how to apologize. Our third mini-newsletter will discuss arguing. And finally, we take a look at learning to accept the people in your life.



The lost art of Apology

Let's face it. We don't really know how to apologize. We compensate for our lack of knowledge and skill by making feeble attempts which rarely work. Some people rely on their good looks while others bat pathetic puppy dog eyes to get them out of scrapes. If you want to improve your relationships, it's time to learn the art of apology.

There are two reasons people apologize. First, people usually apologize to make themselves feel better. This type of apology requires little skill outside of being willing to admit that you made a mistake. The second type of apology relays a genuine concern for the other person's feelings and well being. Your guilt is relieved only when your apology is genuine and based on empathy for the injured person. This type of apology heals relationships and creates genuine bonds.

Feel Good Apology

If you are apologizing to relieve your guilt, and hopefully get someone off your back, stop before you open your mouth. Relieve your guilt through talking to a good friend, therapist or priest. Tell someone who really cares about you. Don't bother telling the person you have injured. You only make things worse.

Why? Because the person you injured doesn't really care why you did something. They don't want to hear that "kids are so mean" or "I was completely lost". By laying out all of the reasons, and defenses, for why you injured them, you are subtly saying that it's not your fault and that the other person should take care of you by telling you that "you're OK". You belittle them and humiliate yourself this way. ❄

Our favorite "feel good" Apologies

We hope that these apologies will help illustrate what a "feel good" apology sounds like and what you should not do. These apologies were collected from real situations.

❄ *"I am sorry I molested you. I was drinking a lot then."* - Most alcoholics do not molest their children.

❄ *"I realize that I was a really bad father. It's not like you came with a book."* - There are thousands of parenting books. Amazon.com lists 3,484 titles.

❄ *"I realize that I was really cruel to you when we were kids. You know how kids are!"* - Bullies act like bullies. Period

❄ *"I am sorry I lied to you. I lie to everyone."* - If someone lies to everyone they can't really say they are sorry.

❄ *"I am sorry you found out about my affair. I didn't intend for you to find out."* - So it's OK to have an affair as long as the other person doesn't find out?

Each of these "feel good" apologies were said to relieve the guilt of the person apologizing. There is no consideration for the feelings of the injured person. If you find yourself in the middle of one of these apologies, shut up. Take a breath and start over. We all make mistakes! ❄

We all make mistakes!

Human beings make mistakes. It's impossible not to make a mistake. Most people struggle to be present in their lives, let alone stay aware of every one else's feelings at any given moment. In order to make a real apology, we must come to grips with the fact that we make mistakes. If you would like to have long term relationships, you must learn to make real apologies.

A Real Apology

The major difference between a "feel good" apology and a real apology is that a real apology begins and ends with the person you have injured whereas the "feel good" apology is about the person who made the mistake. Here are the four steps to making a real apology.

1. Acknowledge the injury. It's important to start by acknowledging that you have injured someone. A simple, "I know that I hurt your feelings", can make a world of difference.

2. Ask the injured what it was like for them. It's important to understand in what way your mistake injured the other person. People are very different. The same mistake can injure people in a wide variety of ways. Taking the time to understand the manner in which you injured someone else increases empathy in your relationship. Ask what hurt. Nothing is more frustrating than being told how you were hurt by someone who gets it wrong! Repeat back what you heard to make sure you did not miss anything. Open your heart to hear the actual injury.

3. Apologize for the injury. Be specific. Make sure to include all the ways that you injured the other person. A real apology might sound like: "I am sorry that I hurt your feelings and you felt stupid by ignoring you at dinner". Every real apology includes "I am sorry" for "specific injury" at "specific time".

4. Ask the injured how you can make it better. When we feel guilty we often desperately want to repair the relationship. In our anxiety and fear of losing the relationship, we make up ways to repair the relationship. Stop working so hard. Ask the injured what you can do to regain their trust. Most people have a clear idea of what you can do to repair the relationship. Ask them.

Follow these easy steps and watch your relationships improve. **Apologies are the backbone of relationships.** This simple skill will greatly impact all of your relationships. Start today. You are bound to make some mistake today. Practice your new skill. You'll be surprised at the results.

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