

EmployeeCare News



Anthony Adams

Apologize: This Time with Sincerity

By Anthony Adams, EmployeeCare Counselor

Chances are you have said “I’m sorry” to someone and didn’t truly mean it. The odds are, perhaps equally as great that someone has apologized to you and it felt lame, insincere, with a lack of atonement.

When I was growing up, I was taught to apologize anytime I wronged someone intentionally or unintentionally. When I pledged a fraternity, their rules required all the Scroller (Pledges) brothers to atone for anything the “big brothers” perceived we did wrong. Loudly, I would say, “I’m sorry Big Brother, Sir.” I must confess, I didn’t really mean it. My apology was usually half-hearted just so they would leave me alone and “get out of my face.”

For some, saying I’m sorry is like having a get-out-of-jail-free card; if I go through the motions of apologizing, then I can go about my merry way. You really aren’t sincere about examining your part in the hurt and this is usually obvious to the other party.

But then there are others who really want to express regret but find it difficult to initiate, especially when time has passed and the tension from the conflict seems diminished.

Perhaps you have a coworker you have broken a promise to and you need to make an apology? Maybe there is someone you know who has recently become ill with a pessimistic prognosis who you need to make amends to, but you wait, hoping for the best and anticipating the worst. Today might be your last opportunity. Could it be that you have said some spiteful things to your

spouse, your child, your coworker, your (fill in the blank) and you need to sincerely apologize? Well, there is hope; just keep reading.

First of all, your apology needs to be sincere. Without sincere apologies, broken relationships remain broken.

In their book, *The Five Love Languages* Dr. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas suggest we give statements of restitution. For example, you could say one of the following:

“Is there anything I can do to make up for what I have done?”

“I know I have hurt you deeply, and I feel like I should do something to repay you for the hurt I have caused? Can you give me a suggestion?”

“I don’t feel right just saying “I’m sorry.” I want to make up for what I have done. What would you consider appropriate?”

“I know I have inconvenienced you. May I give you some of my time to balance things out?”

“I realize I have damaged your honor. May I make a (public) correction?”

“I’ve broken this promise a million times. Would you like me to put my commitment to you in writing?”

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There might be some limitations to Chapman's and Thomas' approach. So let's delve deeper and focus on how Peter Petersen, PhD, explains the art of apology. Petersen suggests writing an apology using a 5-step plan. Here is the example:

1. Describe the offense. This is necessary so the person knows exactly for what you are apologizing. "I've been thinking about your comments that I don't follow through consistently with what I say I'm going to do. Well, I apologize for that."

2. Describe what you think is the effect on the person. Displaying empathy can be comforting. "Being inconsistent means you can never be sure whether I will follow through or not. I imagine it keeps you on edge and you wonder if you should 'remind' me. This puts you in a dilemma. If you don't speak up you run the risk that I won't follow through and then it is too late to take corrective action. If you do speak up, you run the risk of coming across like a nag. Either way, a part of you will feel you can't win".

3. Describe why you did what you did. "I hate to admit it, but when I agree to something, sometimes it's just to get you off my back. I think 'well, I'll do it if I get time.' But if it's something I really don't want to do, often I simply don't make the time. I'm also unreliable when my priorities collide with yours – and my priorities too often prevail. Unfortunately this means I really haven't thought much about us being a true team where we can count on each other. There is one more reason I don't like to admit. I have a strong tendency to be lazy about doing things I don't like doing."

4. Describe why you are interested in changing the offensive behavior. Again this is necessary to demonstrate an understanding of the big picture that we are a team. "I actually have some interest in improving my reliability. Doing so would get you off my back, I would feel more in alignment with my higher intentions about being a good partner, and we could probably have more fun together."

5. Describe a self imposed penalty for not changing. This one is the clincher. You think of an appropriate penalty for your offensive behavior, and tell it to your partner. For example, you might say; "If I don't change I will impose the penalty on myself." This reassures them you mean business. The partner relaxes their vigilance and stops looking over your shoulder and you feel more at ease. "Finally, I want you to get off my back as a police officer to make sure I follow through. Both of us will feel better about that. So when I don't follow through or give you a timely warning (stuff does happen) then I will work on cleaning the garage the following weekend for at least two hours every time I blow it." (Cleaning the garage is an important, but non-urgent task that keeps being avoided).

Sincere apologies are a great way to repair a rupture in a relationship. By offering genuine expressions of regret, you send a strong message that the person and the relationship are valuable to you. The person receiving this type of apology is in a better position to forgive. Without it, they will hear your words but not trust the intention, making forgiveness more difficult.

Today is a good day to begin your apology; but this time, do it with sincerity.

The Region's Leader

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