

The Power of an Apology

Saying you're sorry is not always an admission of guilt; sometimes it helps diffuse a tense negotiating situation

YOU'VE BEEN THROWN A CURVE BALL WHILE ON SITE and know your staff will be greatly inconvenienced. You sent the hotel hundreds of pages of a communication and want to acknowledge all the reading and processing they will have to do. You are in a heavy negotiation and have to change gears when new information comes in. Or, you just messed up because you are having a bad day and did not think "it" — your words, actions, planning, attitude — through.

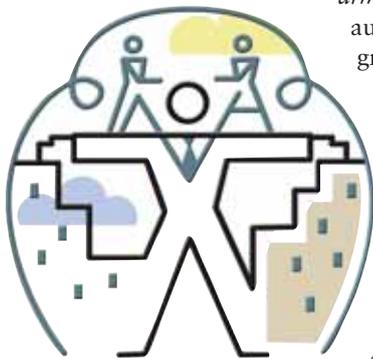
All of these scenarios are perfect opportunities for a heartfelt apology. In negotiating, offering an apology can work wonders to keep the negotiation moving forward. A great negotiating skill is to be able to "deflect, disarm, and diffuse" a difficult situation with your partner so you can concentrate on the issues. In *Tongue Fu!: Deflect, Disarm, & Diffuse Any Verbal Conflict*, author Sam Horn describes how to gracefully exit an argument. One of the ways to take the sting out of what you did or the hurt you caused is to say, "I am sorry."

There are two types of apologies. The first is the "I am sorry you feel that way" or "I am sorry you are hurt" apology, which I take to mean "such is life and it stinks." This is useful if you meant "it," but your intention was not to inflict harm.

While this expression of regret does not admit culpability, a savvy recipient may catch on to your non-apology apology.

The second type of "I'm sorry" is just that. It means "it is my fault and I take responsibility." In a court of law and in many jurisdictions, an apology can be used as an admission of guilt.

Luckily, most negotiations do not end up in court. Even if "it" was your fault, you have choices. You can pretend that the other person is not impacted, blame your boss for the changes ... or you can step up to the plate and admit your part in creating a negative situation. You do not



Further Reading

Tongue Fu!: Deflect, Disarm, & Diffuse Any Verbal Conflict, by Sam Horn

The purpose of Kung Fu, the Chinese art of self-defense, is to fend off physical attacks. According to professional speaker and consultant Horn, the purpose of Tongue Fu, a spoken form of self-defense, is to guard against psychological attacks. Dealing with difficult people is a part of everyday life. Divided into four sections, the book offers techniques and skills for responding thoughtfully in conflicts, expressing honest feelings and goals, seeking cooperation in difficult situations, and living a life of value during trying times. Each of the 30 chapters offers examples that demonstrate the expected goals and acquired skills in action.

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even have to qualify it by adding that you "did not think 'it' through," or "were not forthcoming." That could be added if it was a major "it" and they are unduly impacted by something you could have prevented.

Saying you're sorry should be one of your communication strategies for successful negotiations. It can help validate your counterpart's feeling of being wronged. Once that need is met, it could serve to make the negotiation easier. You can both get back on a positive track and work together to solve the problem. Remember, you share a common goal: a great meeting. ■

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