



The perfect apology....

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“Love is never having to say you’re sorry”, although it sure makes most people feel better.

We all, every now and again, say or do things that we feel we need to apologize for. An apology, like anything else, hinges on the way we deliver it. An effective apology is also the quickest way to build a professional and positive reputation.

But before you offer that apology, clarify your purpose.

Who do you want to “make feel better”: you or your friend, client, mate?

Personal story:

I faxed something to a professional group several weeks ago. Since their representative said that she was under a tight deadline, I wanted to verify that she had all the needed information to make her changes and deadlines. I emailed and phoned to let her know that the fax was just sent. In the messages, I requested that she let me know when she had received them. I didn’t get a response, so phoned her a few days later. No response. .

Four weeks later, I call again to touch base and find out when I would receive the final version.

Oh – yes, I did receive the fax. Thanks. I’m sorry that I did not respond. After I got the fax, I went on vacation. Then when I got back, I had a million of accumulated items. So I was in “catch-up” mode.. Then my nephew took a tumbled and ended up at the hospital for some stitches,...

Her list went on for some time, although I tuned out after the third excuse. I think I may have even interrupted her apology so I could find out what I really wanted to know, which was: **What is the status of my stuff?**

Technically, she did apologize although I won’t be sending further business her way.

So – what makes an effective apology?

People most often apologize because someone feels they did something wrong.

Bottom line: The people that you’ve “wronged” don’t **initially** care why you did what you did. Their primary focus is on themselves and how inconvenienced they are feeling.

Four quick steps to the perfect apology.

1) Consider the intended audience.

Why are you apologizing?

Are you apologizing to make yourself “feel better” for something?

Or are you apologizing to keep a client? Do you want to make your client “feel secured” that you are professional and committed to your collaborative success?

Are you apologizing to a friend or loved one?

If you are attempting a sincere and authentic based regret, take responsibility for your actions (or lack of action). Subterfuging your accountability with a list of excuses only buries your professionalism, genuineness and integrity.

2) Respond immediately

First rule of client satisfaction is immediate response. It doesn't take much time to send a note, or voice mail stating that you have received their inquiry. You don't have to actually complete or answer their concerns in this initial note. It's sufficient just to acknowledge receipt and that you'll review and response within XXXX days. Today's technology also makes it easy to setup an automatic response system.

In the above example, if I had received an automatic note upon fax and/or email receipt, I would have realized that she would be away from email for several weeks. If her answering machine indicated that she was away, I would have realized that my copies would not be available for several weeks. I would have had my status immediately.

3) Go the extra mile.

Don't just apologize, but make amends. Offer your client a discount for the delay. Treat your friend to dinner for keeping a borrowed item for an outrageous amount of time. Bring over a pan of lasagna for leaving your child much longer than intended at a friend's house. Replace the item that you broke/lost and include a certificate for an additional gift. Pick up the check when you are over 10 minutes late meeting a friend for lunch.

4) Avoid repeating

Don't treat an apology like shampoo. Don't rinse and repeat.

If you find yourself repeating the same scenarios over and over again, and you are consistently inconveniencing others, your apology is worthless (even if you think you are sincerely sorry).

Find ways to avoid repeating the scene. For instance, if you are constantly late, tell your friends that you will meet them there and/or go into the movie (or start without you). You'll simply catch up with them. Make arrangement to meet folks at their office, home or where ever they are already planning to be. This way, they haven't gone out of their way to meet-up with you. With the knowing that you might be late, go out of your way not to inconvenience them.

If you have a tendency to borrow things and not return them, don't borrow. Maybe just read, use, take notes, scans the item while it's still in the owner's possession.

If you have a wealth of promised tasks accumulating, delegate or hand-off some tasks to others and avoid accepting new ones.

If you don't nail a hook on the wall, you'll never be able to hang your hat.

Special Note: Don't take tip 4 to extremes.

One client had trouble following-through on his commitments, so he stopped making any. Although he doesn't like the fact that he can't seem to follow-through with his plans, he is more worried that people will think he is unreliable, undependable and "a loser". So, to avoid this, he avoided promises and commitments altogether.

This, I do not recommend. Avoiding making promises and commitments doesn't make you more reliable or dependable. It just makes you useless. Friends still can't rely or depend upon you. You certainly can't attract clients, if you don't say what you will do for them.

Instead we worked together on how to make small, effective and realistic commitments. Once the feeling of accomplishment and achievement appeared, he was on his way. The intention isn't to jump the mountain in one giant leap. We'll just conquer one step at a time.

Conclusion:

Apologies, like anything else, hinges on the way you deliver them. The above article covers some very effective and easy ways to best deliver them. These techniques not only make you and others feel good, they build a positive reputation for professionalism and integrity.

Law of Attraction: "Without exception that which you give thought to is that which you begin to invite into your experience". Abraham Hicks.

About the author

Laura is a certified personal life coach. She has been in the software and testing industry for over 20 years. She's worked with such companies as IBM, Eriksson, Staples, Fidelity Investments and Sogeti in various client advocacy and project management roles. The techniques she uses in her business coaching and client advocacy work saved these companies both time and money, which resulted in on-time, quality product delivery with higher client satisfaction.

Laura now uses her client focus, project, quality and people management skills in her personal life coaching career. As a personal life coach, she helps people integrate their goals and dreams into their everyday lives. Laura uses creative and practical tools to help her clients realize what really matters to

them. They then follow-through with project and time management techniques to create the reality they really want.

Laura authors many articles and workshops on time management and strategic scheduling. She is also the founder of the electronic magazine *the Rose Garden: the Art of Becoming*. Also, check out <http://thelaurarose.blogspot.com/>

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