

APPENDIX

APOLOGY CHEAT SHEET

Things *Not* to Say When Apologizing at Work

When do you tune out of an apology and decide the other person is insincere? Often, we reject an apology as soon as we hear words that blame, excuse, or deny. Do you want to use best practices for apologies that actually work? If so, omit these phrases. When I (Jennifer) am sitting in my consultant chair and I hear these phrases being spoken to a colleague, I often stop the action and say, “You are heading in the WRONG direction. Proceed only if you intend to wreck this relationship with a non-apology.”

- Haven’t you gotten over that yet?
- I am sorry that you were offended.
- I should be excused because I . . .
- You’re too sensitive. I was only joking.
- What’s the big deal?
- To the extent that you were offended, I apologize.
- Give me a break.
- You just need to get over it.
- There is nothing I can do about that now. I can’t take away the past!

Things *to* Say When Apologizing at Work

What is the right way to apologize? There are two good methods: you could write down the apology and then read it to the

person, or you could just say it. Do not try to give a serious apology via electronic media. Taking the time to speak directly with someone better conveys your sincerity.

Here is a useful phrase to help you jump back into an issue: “I’d like to circle back to (name the issue). I realize that I didn’t say (or do) things the right way. I apologize for that.” This method brings you back to the topic, and it shows your intent to be open and non-defensive.

Next, use some of these tried-and-true apology phrases. Use more than one of these if they really apply to your situation, if the offense has happened repeatedly, and/or if the damage was serious:

- I did it, and I have no excuse.
- I’ve damaged your trust.
- I was careless, insensitive, thoughtless, or rude.
- I will do the work to fix my mistake going forward.
- You have every right to be upset.
- My mistake is part of a pattern that I need to change.
- I will rebuild your trust by . . .
- I’ve put you in a very difficult position.
- I realize that talk is cheap. I know that I need to show you how I will change.

Visit 5lovelanguages.com to take the *Making Things Right at Work* Apology Assessment online.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 5: THE (HIGH) COST OF INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

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3. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationships* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2022).
4. Brené Brown, *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Random House, 2017), xx.
5. Quote by Flynn Zaiger, CEO of Online Optimism (a digital marketing firm). Private email conversation between Mr. Zaiger and Jennifer Thomas. Shared with permission.

CHAPTER 9: BEST PRACTICES (AND NOT-SO-GOOD ONES)

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2. Kieran Corcoran, “Southwest Airlines Apologized for Asking a Woman to ‘Prove’ Her Mixed-Race Son Was Hers Before Flying,” *Business Insider*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/southwest-apologizes-for-asking-mom-to-prove-mixed-race-son-is-hers-2018-5>.

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2. John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), xx.

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2. Two excellent resources in this area are Stephen M. R. Covey’s *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* and Paul J. Zak’s *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performing Companies*.