



Course Director:
Prof Manie Spoelstra



INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY

Negotiation: The Genesis of Management



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- Managers at senior, middle and junior levels
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- Hostage & Crowd Control Negotiators
- Facilitators

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The Power of an Apology

“I am sorry that I sent you this newsletter.

I sincerely **apologize** that I expect you to use your valuable time to open it and to even read a few words!

My apology also for thinking that you may read some of the programs that I advertise, and thinking that you may even consider spending your valuable time and money to attend one of them.”

(By the way, if you are still reading, it already proves that an ‘apology’ does

get your attention! So let me abuse this ‘power’ a little further:)

“I am **sorry that I underestimate** your present skills and intelligence to even

contemplate that I could teach you anything of value!

Lastly I am sorry that you used valuable and expensive data time to download this email and that you or your company had to spend hard-earned cash to pay for the

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download.

I am sorry that I wasted Eskom's power (for all the computers). Of course I also **apologize** to the environmentalists since coal is used to produce power. There is global warming and, of course there is huge strain on your eyes)! I am flipping sorry for that!

I admit that I am **not sorry** for everything in this email. There are some good sentences in the third paragraph on the next page. I really believe those lines!

- **"I'm sorry"**

These two little words can make or break a relationship. It is human nature to make mistakes, but making an apology is not.

There are some who find it easy to apologise and there are some who find it extremely difficult. **Admitting your mistake is a bitter pill** to swallow, yet being able to do so often makes one a better person, more or less.

You are aware that you did something wrong, which is why someone is upset with you. Deep in your heart, you know that you owe the person an apology. Do you apologize?

The power of an apology cannot be undermined.

A sincere apology is genuine, and it means that you are **truly and honestly**

sorry for what you've done. On the other hand, an insincere one could only offend the other person and make matters blow out of proportion.

Excuse or Apology?

Stop making excuses when you apologise. An apology becomes more sincere if you're a man (or woman) enough to take full responsibility for your actions. Being **defensive** only shows that you don't admit the wrong that you've done and could end up in a heated argument between you and the other party.

A sincere apology needs a sincere promise. When apologizing, make a **sincere promise** and try to stick to it. Saying "I'm sorry" can be hard, but people hold more respect for a person who knows how to apologize. Besides, it is easier to forgive a person who makes a sincere apology than one who doesn't care at all.

Requirements for an apology to be accepted

- It must be done by the culprit **himself** preferably
- The apologist must really have **remorse and be genuine** (no fake apologies!)
- The apologist must not apologise and **repeat** his wrongful action soon again!

Emotional benefits of an Apology

- A person who has been harmed feels **emotional healed** when

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- he/she is acknowledged by the wrongdoer
- When we receive an apology, we no longer perceive the culprit as a **personal threat**
- An apology helps us to move past our anger and prevents us from being stuck in the past
- Apology opens the door to **forgiveness** by allowing us to have empathy for the wrongdoer

An Apology benefits both sides

- The debilitating effects of the remorse and shame we may feel when we've hurt another person can eat away at us until we become emotionally and physically ill. By apologizing and taking responsibility for our actions we help rid ourselves of **self-blame and guilt**
- An apology has the power to **humble even the most arrogant**. When we develop the courage to admit we are wrong and work past our resistance to apologizing, we develop a deep sense of self-respect
- Apologizing helps us remain **emotionally connected** to our friends and loved ones. Knowing we have wronged someone may cause us to distance ourselves from the person, but once we have apologized we feel freer to be intimate again.

- And there is another subtle benefit: Since apologizing usually causes us to feel humiliated, it can also act as a deterrent, **reminding us to not repeat** the act

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Apology: Strength or Weakness?

J F Kennedy, Ghandi, Martin Luther King (jr) and some others have stated a number of times:

“Only the strong can afford to be weak. In fact the strong, by being weak, becomes even stronger!”

It is so sad that so many leaders and individuals do not practice this principle. The words: “I am sorry”; “We want to apologise”; “I made a mistake” or “I admit you were right”, could be your **strongest first move** when you try to negotiate, mediate or persuade someone to accept you again and to listen to the rest of your story!

Manie Spoelstra

Sources:

2004; J Rayner; ‘The Apologist’, Atlantic Books, London
2004; A Lazare; ‘On Apology’; Oxford University Press, U.K.