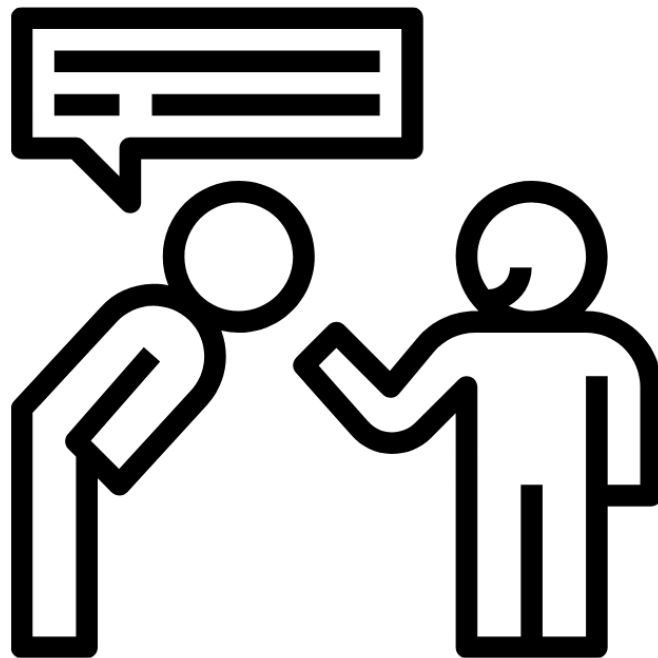


# APOLOGIZE EFFECTIVELY



# Apologize Effectively

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# Apologize Effectively

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## Introduction

Despite our best intentions, people violate expectations and commitments, and communicate in hurtful ways. Apologies are part of everyday interactions, and when delivered in a sincere way, they can make a relationship stronger. Too often they do not deliver the heartfelt regret.

**This is an overview of how to deliver an effective apology.**

Researchers investigated whether certain components of an apology were perceived as more critical for the apology to be perceived as effective. Apologies for a trust violation were perceived as more effective when they contained a greater number of the following components:

- an acknowledgment of responsibility,
- an explanation of what went wrong,
- an expression of regret,
- an offer of repair,
- a declaration of repentance,
- and a request for forgiveness.

*Lewicki, R. J., Polin, B., & Lount, R. B. (2016). An exploration of the structure of effective apologies. Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 9, 177-196.*

This study revealed that while having all the above components is important, some are more important than others. **An acknowledgement of responsibility and an offer of repair** were considered the most important components, **while a request for forgiveness was considered the least important.**

Apologies can be given in person or in writing. It is much more powerful, face to face, however there are times when writing out an apology can be the best way to convey your feelings.

For some, expressing remorse (Step 3) can be very challenging, because it involves acknowledging disappointment in oneself. In order to share these feelings, you have to have a comfort level with being vulnerable.

Give yourself 20-30 minutes and write out your answers to the questions on the following pages. Reflecting, and writing, will help you understand how, in the past, you proceeded in an apology and open you up to a new approach that is meaningful.

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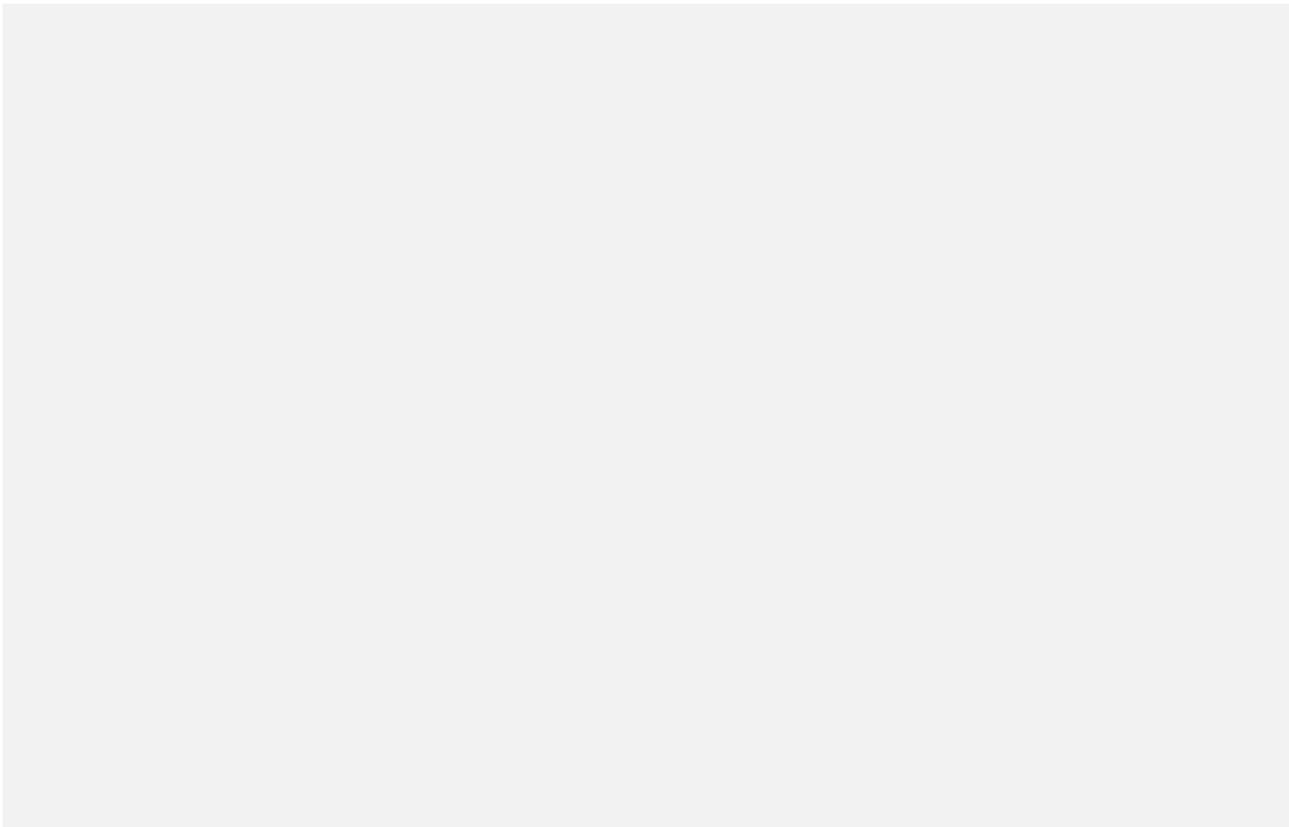
Before you deliver your apology, it can be helpful to think about how that person felt; put yourself in their shoes. Make eye contact when making the apology.

Think about the following when you construct your apology:

- What would you like to hear if you were hurt in this way?
- Can you understand that sharing these feelings may help to restore the bond between the two of you?

There is definitely a degree of vulnerability when apologizing which may be why it happens less often than necessary.

**Write about your reaction to being vulnerable.** Vulnerability is about dealing with uncertainty and managing the riskiness of this emotionally. Write about what happens when you are not in control of the outcome. *This workbook is for your eyes only, so be open and honest. Writing this out, takes away the power behind any fear or trepidation.*



*Next are four steps to make your apology heartfelt and powerful.*

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### Step 1: Acknowledge and Take Responsibility

“I’m sorry, I made a mistake” (using the pronoun “I” is important here)

*You acknowledge who was harmed:*

“I realize that I hurt you...”

*and indicate the nature of the offense:*

“... by making that insensitive joke”

**Note that this is in sharp contrast with the way apologies are often made. Note the “non-apologies.”**

#### **Non-apologies:**

*Failing to allocate responsibility:*

“Yes, mistakes were made”

*Issuing vague statements about who was hurt:*

“I see that some people may feel offended”

*Failing to acknowledge the specific offense:*

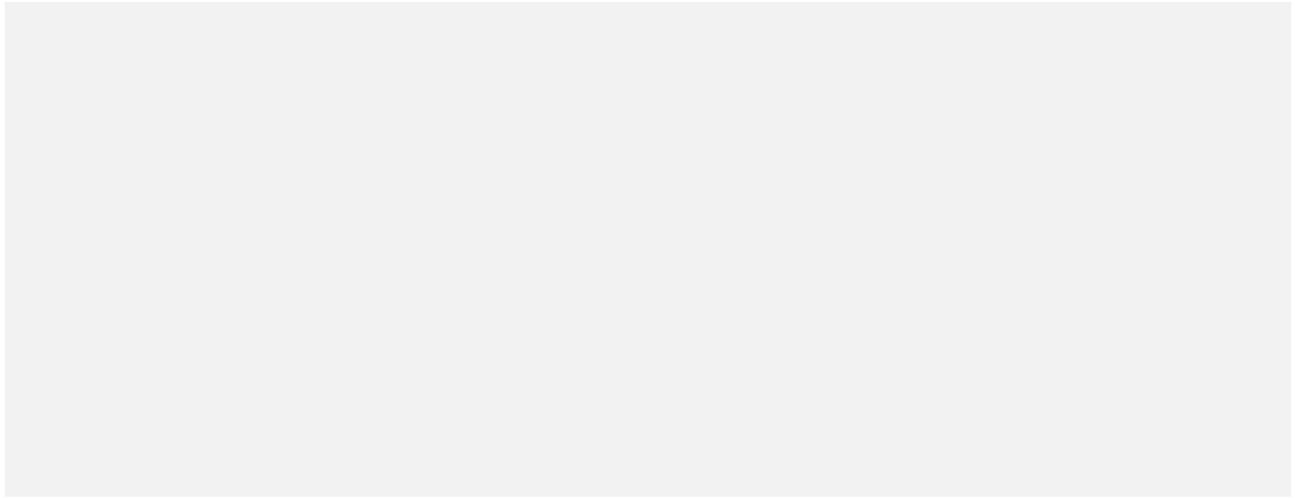
“... by whatever I said”

*On the next page, take a few moments to reflect and write out your responses to the questions.*

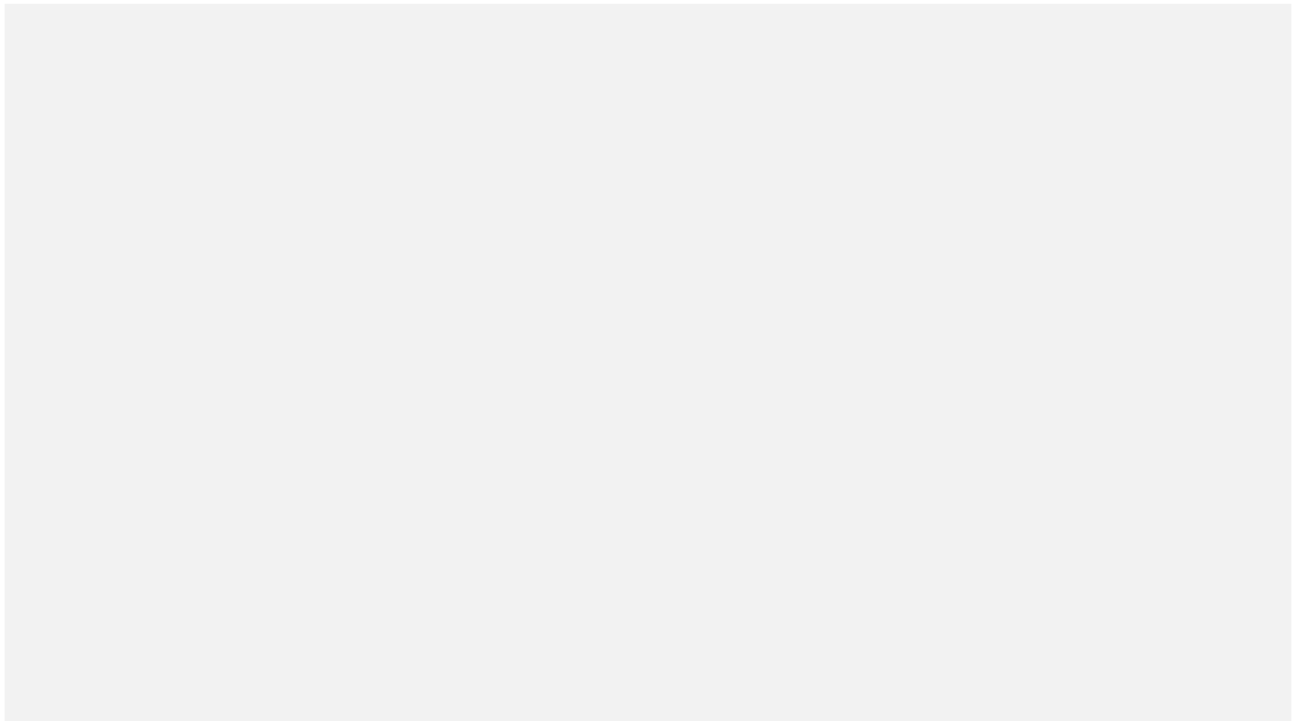
## **Apologize Effectively**

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**Write out your typical approach to apologies:**



**What is your reaction when someone gives you a “non-apology, as in the above example? Write it out:**



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### Step 2: Provide an Explanation (Not Excuses)

Provide an explanation for the offense that makes clear that it was not your intention to hurt the other person.

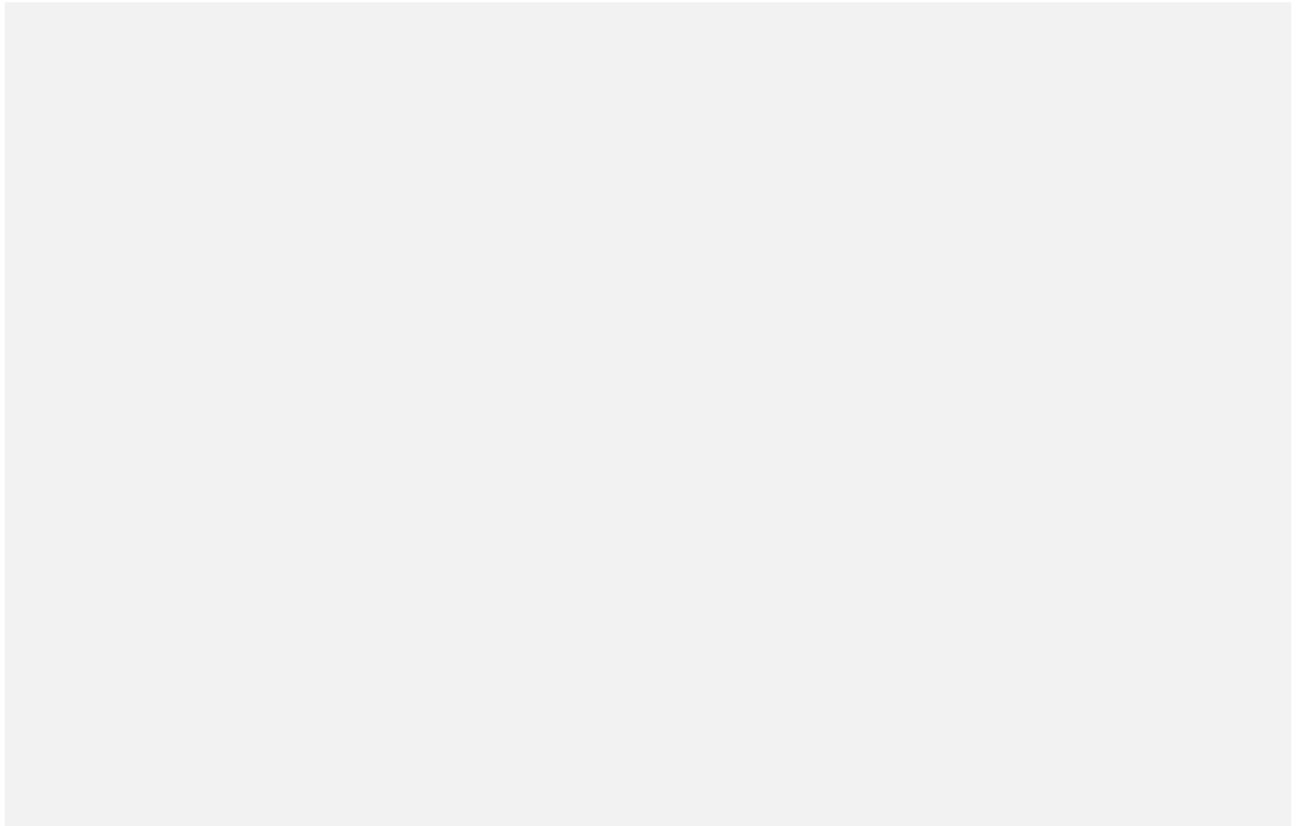
“It was never my intention to hurt you and make you feel this way”

“I have changed my schedule so this will not happen again”

It is important to note that explanations should not sound like excuses (“I was really busy and had a tough day at my work”).

Many excuses come across as shallow defenses and can be counterproductive. Moreover, explanations should not sound like attempts to blame the victim (“I just could no longer stand the way you were acting”).

**Write about a positive experience you had when giving, or receiving, an apology:**



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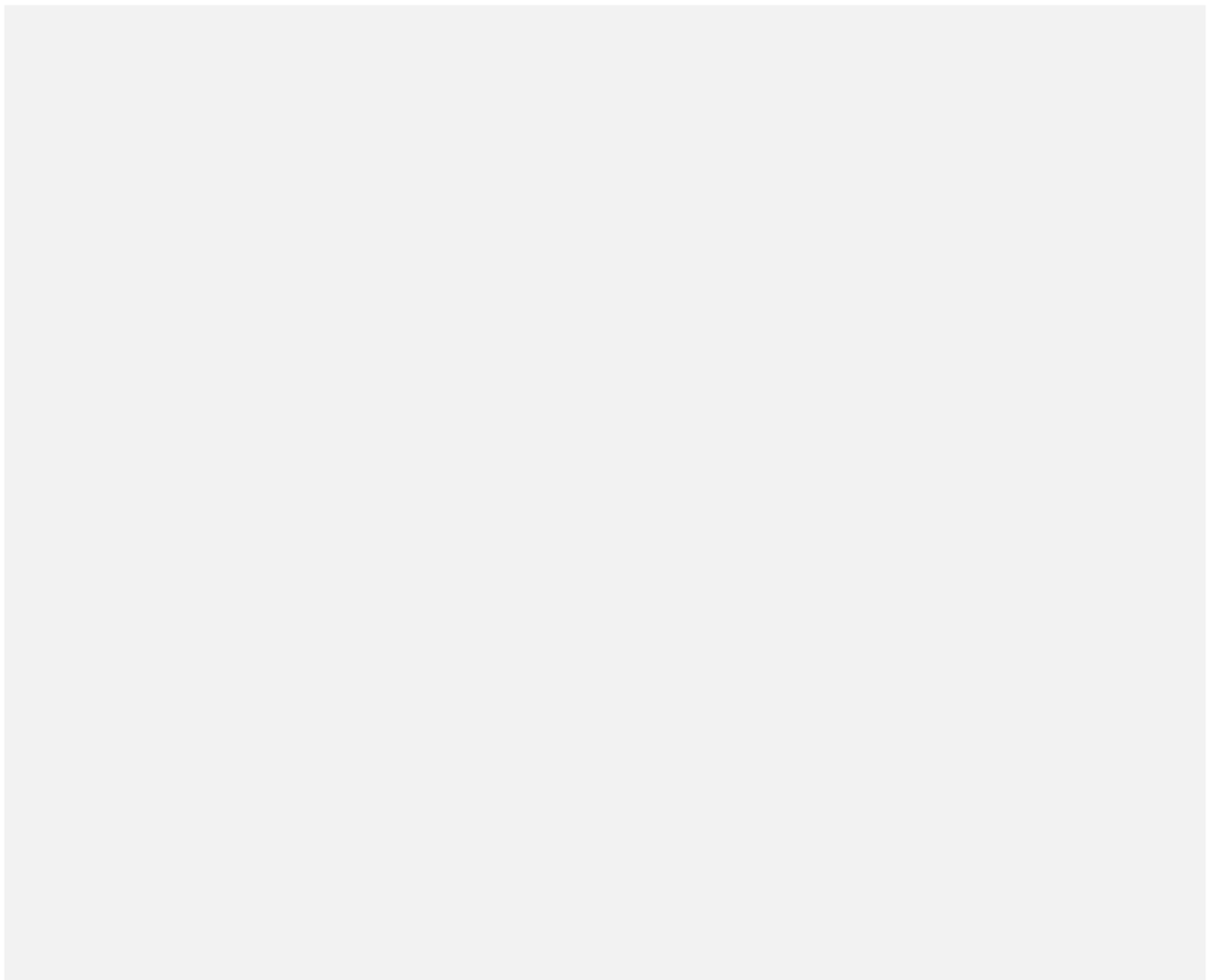
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### Step 3: Express Remorse

When hurting someone, it is common to feel shame, embarrassment, regret humiliation, or remorse. By expressing these feelings, you communicate to the person you have hurt, that you recognize your mistake, and the suffering it caused them.

*"I feel really badly about what happened. For days I have felt embarrassed about how I let you down".*

**Write about a recent incidence when you hurt someone. What happened, how did you feel and what did you do about it:**





## Apologize Effectively

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### SUPERTIP

Our brain is hardwired to operate in the primitive survival instinct when any real or imagined threat triggers it. This limits perspective and options. You may be in the stress reaction when involved in an apology due to your state of vulnerability.

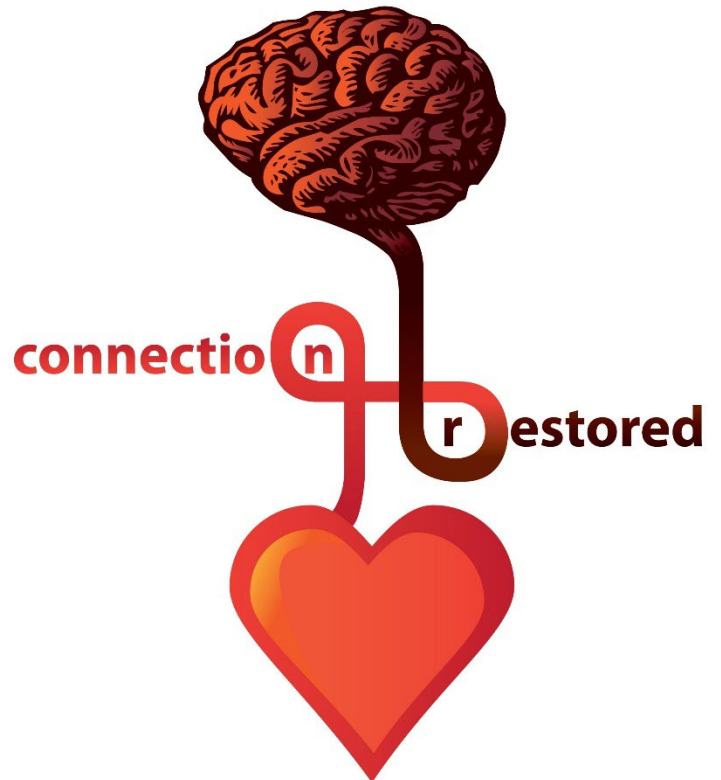
One way to shift out of it is the engage in deliberate breathing with the expression of gratitude for about one minute.

1.) To begin, direct that gratitude to yourself for 30 seconds. Then direct that gratitude to the other person for 30 seconds.

It may take you practice keeping your thoughts from wandering. When the thoughts do wander just bring them back to the gratitude and experience it flowing to you or the other person.

Once you have unhooked your brain with the flooding of gratitude, quiet your mind and ask your inner genius, if there is an ideal way to express yourself to this person.

**After engaging in the gratitude breathing, write out what you learned:**



## Apologize Effectively

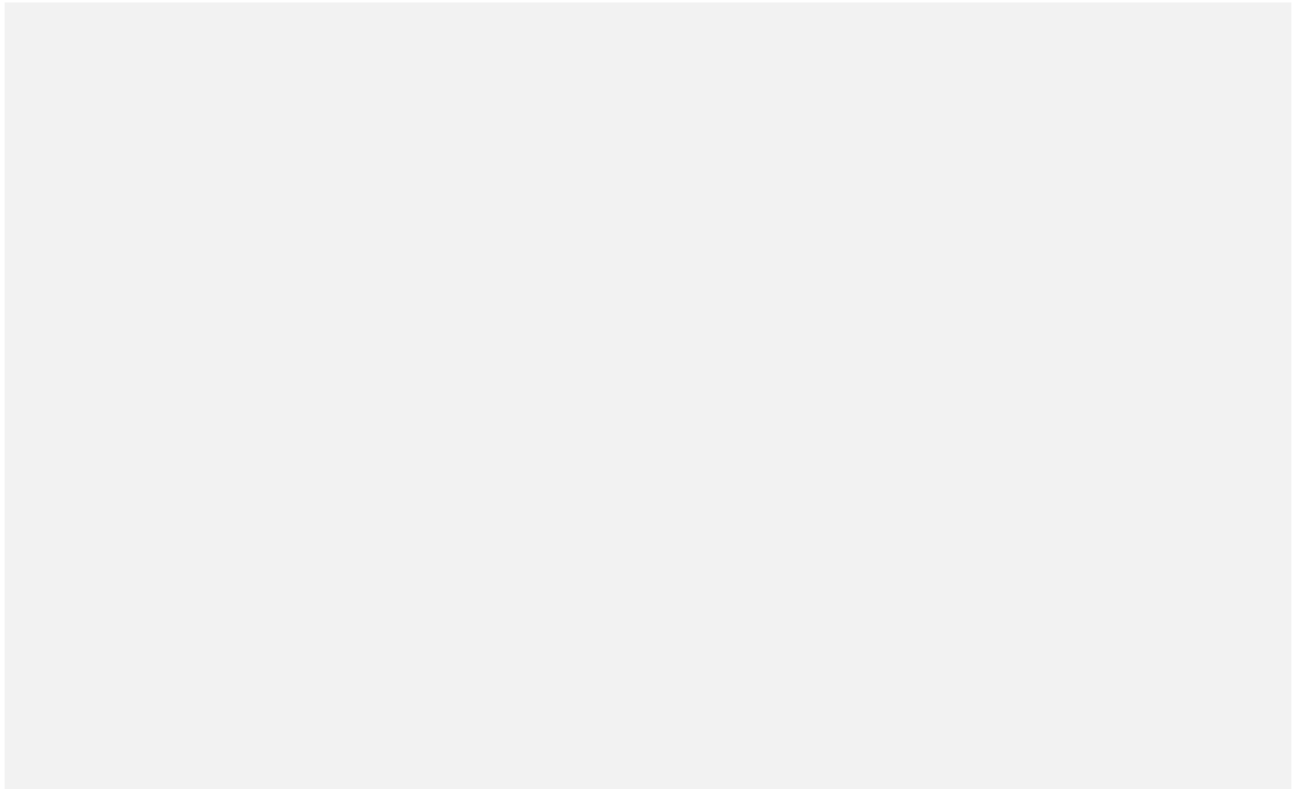
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### Step 4: Make Amends

An effective apology includes a question about how to repair the damage done. It is important to **first ask the offended person what a possible reparation may look like** before engaging in actions to restore the relationship or to alleviate personal feelings of guilt.

Reparation of damage may include compensation for lost resources (financial) or behavioral actions (e.g. being more honest). For example, if you spilled red wine on someone and stained their clothes you might offer to pay the dry cleaning and even replace their blouse or shirt. If you missed a deadline with your boss that caused a problem with a customer, you might agree to work with that customer to repair the damage and make a commitment to being on time with your reports.

**Write out some of the ways you have made amends to others and what that looked like.**

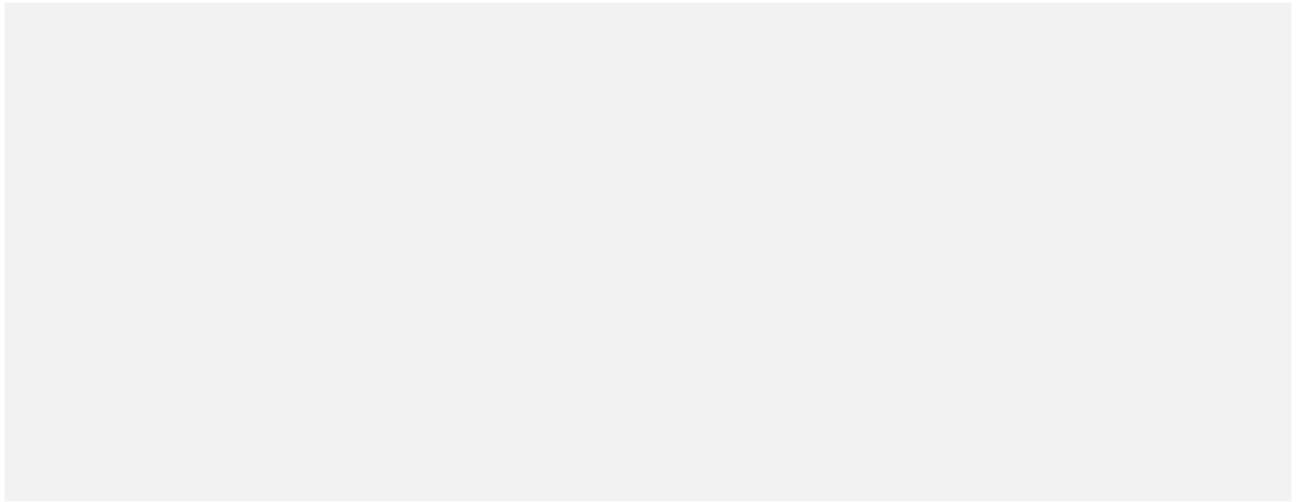


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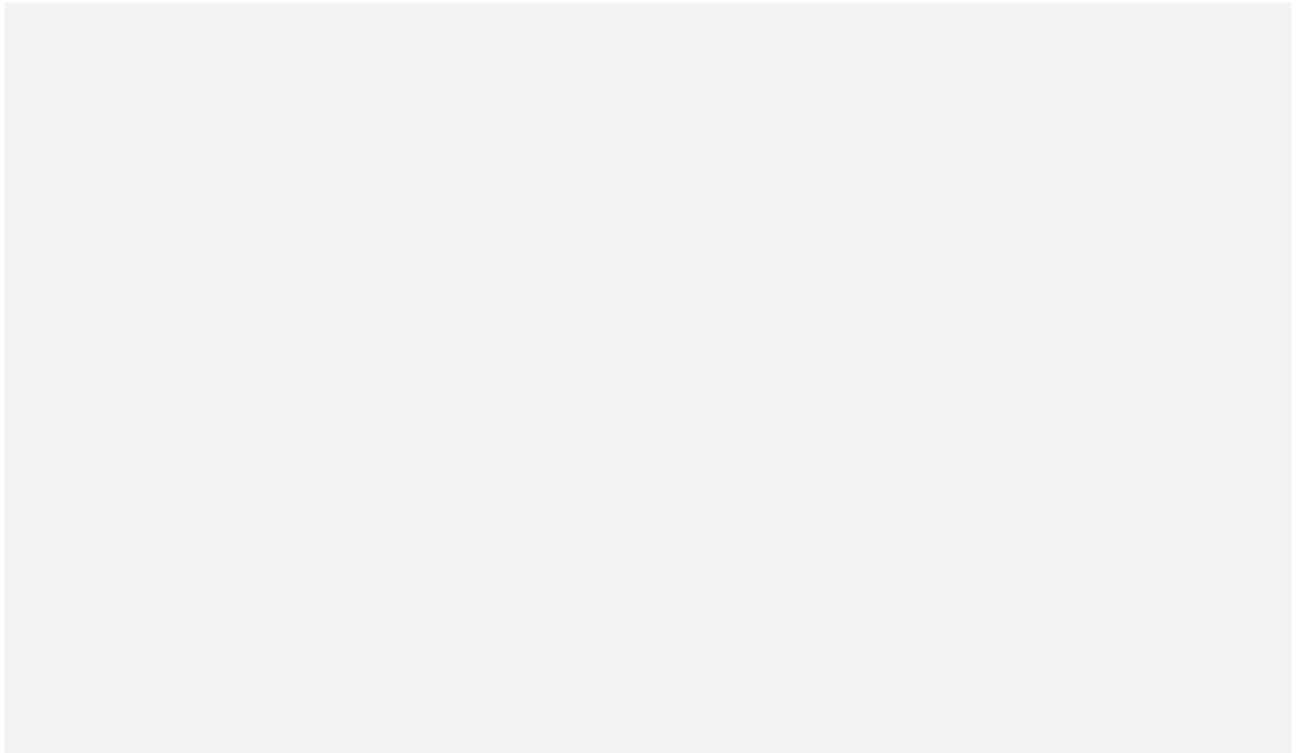
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Notes:

How will your interactions change as a result of this exercise?



**Make a list of people you would like to apologize.** This does not mean you will, it is a starting place for you to unload any burdens of guilt or conviction. The more willing you are to admit mistakes and agree to move on, the deeper and more satisfying will your relationships become.



## Apologize Effectively

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### Receiving An Apology

Giving an apology is one set of skills, now let's talk about accepting an apology. Accepting an apology at its very basic level is simply acknowledging the other person.

Accepting an apology does not mean you forgive the other person; however, it is one step closer. Accepting someone's apology means you acknowledge this step they are taking to take responsibility for their actions.

There can be a tendency to want to unload raw emotion on them and get back at them for what they caused you. Revenge is never a good idea.

Accept the apology with honest and authentic feedback like:

"I appreciate your apology, but I need time to process what happened."

"I am glad you apologized, but I am not ready to trust you."

"I understand that you were in a tight spot, and I appreciate your apology. Let's move on."

When you keep the main goal in mind, of getting the relationship back on track, you will have the direction you need to accept the apology and move on.

**What happens when you receive an apology? Are you more likely to unload on the person, say nothing, or to be open and authentic? Write about a recent apology and what happened:**

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### Message from Dr. Howard

Thank you for your purchase of this resource from the Work Smart Club! We are one of your biggest fans and want you to succeed!

We are committed to helping those leaders and professionals who want to move further ahead than they thought possible.

Now that you have this resource, you are part of the Club, your center for Work and Well-being.

Our mission is to transform the workplace through inspired and innovative leadership; we help you succeed and together, we achieve an amazing goal.

We love to know how this resource impacted you and what we can do to improve, I want to hear from you. Please tell us what you think:

- What insights did you get from this resource?
- Will you be changing how you do something? If so, in what way?
- Would you recommend this resource to others?
- Was something confusing or lacking in this resource?

Please email me at [contact@worksmartclubnetwork.com](mailto:contact@worksmartclubnetwork.com).

Stay energized!

Dr. Cynthia Howard

Dr. Cynthia Howard

CEO, Chief *Energy* Officer, Work Smart Consulting

Founder, Work Smart Club

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