

## A Short Course on the Art of Apologizing By Nancy Friedman

- Gee, I'm so sorry
- Sorry 'bout that
- My apologies, I didn't mean to

There are probably dozens of ways to apologize and many more ways of accepting one.

How important is an apology? Why do we apologize? And what words seem to work better than others?

You get the picture. When you look up the word APOLOGY, it reads:

***To express or make an apology; acknowledging failings or faults.***

And the words I'm sorry and I apologize are NOT always interchangeable. **Example:** A parent passes away and we normally say:

***I'm so sorry to hear about your loss.***

"I apologize your father passed away" just doesn't seem right.

However, both can be easily used in an apology; to acknowledge a failing or fault.

When you bump into someone at the mall, instinctively, most of us say, "Oh I'm so sorry" or you could say, "I apologize, I wasn't watching where I was going." In this case they're interchangeable. Think for a moment what you're thinking when someone does bump into you and they don't apologize? Hmmmm?

On a recent bumpy flight the pilot came on and said: "I apologize for the bumpy flight." He also could have said, "Sorry folks, for the bumpy flight." Again, 'interchangeable.'

### Apologies in Business vs. Personal



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Seems as though personal apologies might be a little easier than a business apology. In my opinion, that's because we normally know the person fairly well in the personal setting and can figure out what to say and do a little easier. And often we can even send candy, flowers or something else in a bribery fashion so to speak.

However, when something happens in a business setting and the customer is IRATE and is in need of an apology, that's a different story. In many cases we don't get to meet all of our customers and if we do it's normally on a pretty limited basis. Most of the time it's a phone call. And then, of course, even if we are more familiar with the business customer, where is that line in the sand? Dare we cross over it?

For an apology in the business arena, we suggest using the word APOLOGIZE. It's a classier word; raises the bar. To just be 'sorry' for something can easily diminish the effectiveness of the apology.

"Mr. Smith, I apologize for sending the wrong invoice. That's got to be very frustrating."

To simply push it away with, "Sorry about sending the wrong invoice" takes the sensitivity and meaningfulness away.

And what if you're **not** wrong and the customer still perceives you as wrong? Do you still need to apologize? Of course you do. It doesn't matter if you're right or wrong. When the customer perceives you're wrong, you're wrong.

And for those who say "the customer is always right," we ask you to change that to the mentality we use, "the customer always thinks they're right." And that's the perception we need to deal with.

### **Timing of Apology**

The immediacy of an apology is key. Whichever you use, I'm sorry or I apologize, do not delay. The sooner those words are used, the closer they are to the happening, the more effective they are.

Don't wait to say I'm sorry or I apologize. They're like please and thank you. Important and very relevant.

### **Easy Rule of Thumb on When to Use Which Word**

You're SORRY when you step on someone's toes. (**A human emotion**)

We APOLOGIZE when the customer is unhappy. He perceives we have done something wrong; we failed. (**An incident**)

### **Ineffective Apologies**

You hear it all the time, "**Sorry 'bout that.**" That's a cliché; not an apology. Lose it.

Say it fully: I'm sorry I gave you the wrong change. Sorry 'bout that doesn't cut it.

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