

Meaningful Apologies – Sept. 2023

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email For September 2023

Well, here we are with the daffodils finished, roses beginning to bloom, fruit trees blossoming, and I guess we're all adjusting to another round of day light saving. Where has the year gone!!!

Often times, something happens that prompts the subject matter for these emails, but this month I came across some of what follows, in something that came across my desk, and felt it was worthy to be shared. We trust, as always, that it helps to prompt a check-up, or just some help to improve in an important area we all experience at some point, in our marriage journey.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a bad apology? How did it make you feel? Even if you couldn't articulate exactly what was off about it, you might have walked away feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, or even more hurt or angry than you were initially. Have you been on the other side of this situation? You tried to apologize to your spouse, but it was not received well. Or, maybe, you felt like you were doing all the right things, but it's not coming across the way you'd like. What went wrong? Apologizing to your spouse isn't always easy. It takes humility, self-awareness, and emotional maturity to swallow your pride and admit you were in the wrong. And sometimes, despite our best intentions, our attempt to do so can fall short.

The fact of the matter is, a meaningful apology is more than just uttering the words, "I'm sorry." So let's have a look at some things that can undermine an apology, and see if they can help us to get it better in the future.

1. The "I'm sorry, but...":

In case you haven't figured it out yet, here's Apology gone wrong 101: if you're adding "but" to the end of your apology, you are getting it incredibly wrong. Essentially, you are contradicting anything you said before the word 'But'. Sometimes it's an excuse: "I'm sorry I said that, but I was really frustrated." Other times it's a way to shift blame: "I'm sorry I did that, but you....." And sometimes, you're simply trying to offer an explanation: "I'm sorry I was so late and didn't call, but I took a wrong turn." It's natural to want to explain yourself and even to deflect blame away from yourself. However, attaching these conditions to your apology is essentially leaning into an excuse for what you did, instead of just accepting that what you did was wrong. If an apology goes wrong, check if you used the 'But' word. Instead, work on taking ownership and responsibility for your actions and their consequences. It's not easy by any means, but it goes a long way in expressing a meaningful apology. It also sets the tone for resolving conflicts that often get made worse by a badly delivered apology.

2. Inappropriate body language:

Body language might seem less important than the words you're saying, but it really is the foundation to communicating in a genuine way. Think of a time you were talking to someone whose body language didn't align with what they were saying. Maybe they were avoiding eye contact, or something was off about their tone of voice. Usually, such actions can make it very difficult to really take what they were saying to heart. Usually, it will cause someone to question whether they were being honest and truthful, or perhaps it will cause you to simply disregard what they were saying altogether. It goes without saying that this is the opposite of what you're going for when apologizing, especially to your spouse. Be mindful of matching your body language to what you're feeling –

making good eye contact, keeping arms uncrossed, using a warm tone of voice, and initiating physical contact when it feels appropriate.

3. Apologizing for your spouse's reaction instead of your offence:

"I'm sorry you feel that way." You've probably heard this classic before. Maybe you've even said it yourself. Sure, it includes the words "I'm sorry" and there's no "but" in there, however... is it really an apology? It's kind of like saying, "You've got feelings about it – that's on you." Focus on apologizing for your own actions. This is a great opportunity to revisit the use of "I" statements: "I'm sorry that I" and without any additional But or reference to their response, taking full responsibility, will in turn have the impact of credibility and integrity behind it.

4. Not validating your spouse's feelings:

This might be considered the other half of #3. While you want to avoid apologizing for your spouse's reaction, you do want to validate the feelings they might be having in the situation. This might sound like, "You're angry with me, and it's understandable," or "You have a right to be upset with me." This is a way of acknowledging how your actions have affected your partner and showing you understand where you went wrong, which is an important part of issuing a genuine apology.

5. Showing no desire to improve:

Some situations are a one-time thing. Maybe you just forgot to pick up the milk or fill the car up with gas. You apologize for a minor, unintentional offence that doesn't require much extra thought. But when the issue is bigger, more repair is required. Part of that is reflecting on, and discussing how, you can do things differently going forward. It could be a promise to work on something individually or a plan for how to avoid the situation in the future.

Hopefully, avoiding these things can help you make amends in a meaningful way that resonates with your spouse. The willingness and desire to grow and be a better partner demonstrates your commitment to your marriage. Without it, an apology can feel a bit incomplete. So, try having a conversation around using this month's email to do a reality check, and have a deep and meaningful conversation around where you both see your level of effectiveness around apologising, and ask each other if you match up or need some work.

Blessings from the team:

Stan & Ronnie; John & Karen.

(Content adapted from article by Dr's. Les & Leslie Parrott)