

The 4-Step Apology Process

The apology process is an alternative to the “I’m sorry” statement that can be considered a negative self-statement. The “I’m sorry” apology is not always effective, because it’s not clear whether someone has understood what they’ve done that has caused the upset and it can be easily used to placate someone, rather than to take responsibility and make amends.

This apology process is an easy method to:

- Remove emotionality from an apology
- Maintain equality between the person offering and those receiving the apology
- Maintain self-respect after a making a mistake
- Own one’s behavior regarding a mistake
- Ensure healthy and clear communication (everyone understands who did what; what were the results and repercussions, etc.)
- Strengthen relationships by reinforcing a commitment after misunderstandings or mistakes

This apology process is *not* about:

- Being forgiven
- Being dependent on the other person’s behaviors or feelings

The words used during an apology and in general, can either help one feel confident or undermined, so pay attention to what you say to yourself, intentionally or inadvertently. This is the process:

- **Step 1: Acknowledgement:** “I acknowledge that I was wrong when I...”
- **Step 2: Apology:** “I apologize for...” (the transgression)
- **Step 3: Amends:** “What can I do to make amends?”
- **Step 4: Recommitment:** “Our (business or personal) relationship is very important to me... and I want to do everything I can to make sure it remains strong... I want to recommit to a continued trust-based friendship/partnership/relationship...”

Practice it in front of the mirror or with friends to see how you feel. It can be liberating for the person offering and receiving the apology, while maintaining respect for everyone involved. Leaders can build their credibility by apologizing in this way, which will reinforce trust and a positive, empowering morale within a team or organization.