



Make Saying Sorry Count

By Dr Lynda Wee

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “sorry” refers to feeling regret or penitence. It is expressed when one has caused unpleasantness, inconvenience or hurt to another.

“When you hurt someone, you crumple them like paper. Saying ‘I’m sorry’ is better than not, but it doesn’t fix things. You can’t return the victim of your carelessness (or worse) to before. Any more than you can completely smooth out the wrinkles on the crumpled paper.”

Britton Gildersleeve

Although saying sorry serves as an instant form of recovery, it does not constitute as a passport to exit an aggrieved situation scathe-free. Just vocalising an apology alone does not undo the damage and disappointment the other party has gone through.

Here are 3 steps that help to make saying sorry count.

1. “I am sorry”

Place ourselves in the other person’s shoes. Apologise and mean it. Be aware of how it is said: the words chosen, tone of voice

used and body language displayed. Be high in empathy, sincere in expression.

2. “It was my fault”

Saying “it was my fault” is not just for the aggrieved party’s healing purpose, it also allows us to listen to ourselves. Owning it jumpstarts our reflection and recalibration processes for continuous self-improvement.

3. “How do I make it right?”

This is the most critical step in expressing sincerity and providing assurance in an apology. Yet, this is the step that most forget to do.

Uttering the word “Sorry” does not fix the problem. It is what we do after that truly counts. Unless we figure how to make it right, we will always commit the same mistake again.

Approach with the spirit of reconciliation. Ask for a brief description of what we have done and the repercussions on the aggrieved party. Next, summarise from his perspective.

Elaborate on our past actions and own up to our misgivings. Assure the aggrieved party by sharing our plan on “how do we make it right?” - how to minimise repeating the same mistake.

Saying sorry, though commonly expressed, is only the first step to rebuilding trust in an unpleasant situation.

To make saying sorry count, it needs to be supported by sincerity and assurance that the same inconveniences will not be repeated. With this, the aggrieved party can decide if he would like to trust us again.