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I'm Sorry! Blame–Game or Accountability?

By Sharon Ellison

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by: **Sharon Ellison**

A powerful tool for health as we approach the new year can be to focus on giving and/or receiving only real apologies when we want to heal a rift with a family member, friend, or co–worker. We hear apologies all the time, but I don't think many of them are sincere. An apology has to be real to heal.

Trang Lei spent the day helping Martha buy furniture and art for her remodeled living room, but Martha never even offered to buy Trang Lei's lunch and so she felt unappreciated. Later when she told Martha she felt hurt, Martha said, "I'm sorry. I was just so excited about what I was buying that I didn't even think about it." Trang Lei did not feel better. In fact, she felt worse.

What was wrong with Martha's apology?

Martha's apology came with a built–in excuse, implying that however she behaved was unintentional—beyond her conscious control. Moreover, Martha has an expectation that Trang Lei will accept the excuse. Thus, Martha perpetuates the original problem by continuing to be more focused on herself than on Trang Lei. I call this kind of apology "Sorry–Excuse."

Even Martha wasn't consciously manipulating, her goal was not to take responsibility but to find a way out of it. In most cases, if you don't accept other people's excuses when they apologize, they will quickly get irrupted at you, blaming you for not being understanding.

When we receive a counterfeit apology we often sense it and so rather than the hurt being healed, it is deepened—as in the old saying, "adding insult to injury." I think almost all of us give such apologies. And we model it for our children.

Guidelines for making real apologies:

One: Identify common formats for apology that are "counterfeit."

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If you clearly various types of bogus apologies, it will help you recognize when you give or receive an one. Here are some examples of common phrasing.

"Sorry—Excuse"

Example: "I'm sorry I didn't call—I've been really busy."

Translation: Please be understanding about the fact that other things were more important than you."

"Sorry—Denial of Intent"

Example: "I'm sorry you took it that way. It wasn't what I meant."

Translation: I think it's too bad that you had difficulty understanding me correctly.

Example: "I'm sorry if I offended you."

Translation: I can't think of anything I did wrong, but if you think so, I'd be happy to apologize so I can get back in your good graces.

"Sorry—Blame"

Example: "I'm sorry I didn't call sooner. Have you been feeling Insecure about our relationship lately?"

Translation: If you are upset about my not calling, the real cause is your own insecurity, not anything I did.

Two: Only say "I'm sorry," when you mean it and can specify exactly what you are apologizing for

When we give what I believe is a "healthy" or authentic apology, we can state clearly what we did that was disrespectful or inconsiderate without: immediately explaining why we did it, telling the person that however it looked or sounded, it wasn't our real intention, or, bringing up some other issue that suggests that the other person contributed to or caused the problem.

For example, instead of focusing on why she didn't buy Trang–Lei's lunch—her excuse, Martha could have taken full responsibility, saying,

"I'm so sorry I hurt you. There is no excuse for me to forget to buy your lunch. Even that would have been a small thank you for how much you helped me. And you spent your only day off doing it."

Here, Martha uses her apology to show her real appreciation as well as her sadness that she didn't do so earlier.

Three: Decline to accept an apology that is not given sincerely.

When you accept an apology, and then walk away knowing it wasn't real, you enter a world of make–believe where you pretend an issue is resolved while harboring resentments. Gently, firmly, without anger, you can decline a hollow apology. For example: If you believe that I simply misunderstood you, then I would rather not have an apology from you. Only if you believe you did something hurtful would I want one.

When you refuse to accept an insincere apology, you refuse to surrender to being manipulated or pacified and you hold the other person more accountable—without having to argue or try to force an

apology. You are likely to feel greater confidence.

Real Apologies Build Character and Respect

If we can change how we give and receive apologies, we can become less defensive, gain insight, grow wiser, and strengthen all of our relationships. We can also, then, be a strong model for others, including our children, teaching them that real apologies show strength of character, gain the respect of others, and have great healing power.

This article is based on the book

by Sharon Ellison, available

through your local bookstore or favorite online bookseller. Sharon Ellison, M.S. is an award winning speaker and international consultant.

Why Book Writers Need A Running Mate

By Marvin D. Cloud

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By far, I have found that the lack of discipline is the biggest hindrance for most people, when it comes to writing a book of any kind. Although I urge you as a would–be writer to develop a theme because once you are clear on "why" you want to write a book, your motivational level will shift into a higher gear, I also urge you to get an accountability partner. This person will be the most important asset you can have as a writer.

However, choose carefully, because the role of the accountability partner is to make sure that you are following your commitment on a daily basis. The partner is responsible for calling, e–mailing you or talking to you by phone or in person every day to check the progress of your book. This person should be gentle enough to keep you encouraged, but forceful enough to not be afraid to chastise you.

In other words, your accountability partner will "hold your feet to the fire" to make sure you keep moving forward. Believe me; this person is worth his or her weight in gold. Why?

Although I promise you that writing a manuscript is easier than you might think—you don't need to be a seasoned writer—it is not the easiest thing in the world to do. There will be plenty of times when you will want to scratch the whole idea. Your accountability partner is your cheerleader, telling you, "We have spirit, yes we do!" and exhorting you on to "V.I.C.T.O.R.Y.," even when it seems like you are in the waning minutes of the game and your team is losing 42-0.

Games are played, one at a time. If you lose today, unless something tragically happens, there will be another one tomorrow. Television's Dr. Phil said, "Everyone wants to be a hero on Saturday. The big difference between winners and losers is that the winners work hard every day to do what it takes to

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win."

If you fail your writing task today, you can start again tomorrow. However, losing seasons occur when in the end, you have lost more than you have won. Most new writers and seasoned ones as well, don't write as much as they can on a daily basis.

Even writing part–time, two pages per day is a good start, and more can easily be done if the effort is put forth. However, most of us need that extra push from someone who genuinely cares about us and our project, to keep us in the game. Although it is good to find a like–minded individual, in some ways, your accountability partner's character should be diametrically opposed to your character.

For example, if you know you need a lot of hand–holding, your accountability partner should definitely be a self–starter. If you are a pessimist, your partner should be an optimist. However, if you are an optimist, it is usually better for you not to pick a pessimist for your partner.

By Marvin D. Cloud, founder of [mybestseller.com](http://www.mybestseller.com) and author of "Get Off The Pot: How to Stop Procrastinating and Write Your Personal Bestseller in 90 Days." Visit <http://www.mybestseller.com> and

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