

INSINCERE APOLOGIES ARE TRUST KILLERS

I had a chance to sit down with the CEO of Compass Strategic Investments. For six months, he lived and worked in the Netherlands, so he had some cultural observations to share. One of the distinctions that he noticed was that Americans often make insincere apologies. When it comes to building trust, being able to say we're sorry and doing it sincerely is an important skill. However insincere apologies, those made out of habit or indifference, are trust killers.

Expressing remorse without any real intent to change comes off as insulting or dismissive, like someone who always comes late to a meeting and says, "I'm sorry I'm late." The likely truth is she never really intended to be on time. No one believes her apology, and so she is not trusted. Do you mean what you say? Whether it is "I am sorry" or, "I will get back to you ASAP," if you can't follow through, don't say it. Make sure you return calls when you say you will and deliver when you say you will. If your intent is good, your words will mean something and you won't have to apologize very often. It's like a mother who says "No" to her child at the candy counter repeatedly with ever increasing volume and intensity. Because the mother has given in to her child's badgering in the past, the child does not trust that Mom means what she says.

The problem also happens when people apologize even though they are not really sorry for what they did. They are only sorry that they got caught. Learning to apologize is only part of it. Doing it sincerely and with genuine intentions is the real test. The next time you feel an apology is in order, ask yourself, Am I sorry to the degree that I am genuinely going to try to make sure it does not happen again? Do I really mean it? Of course it is important to apologize, but so is the action that shows you meant it. Those who only need to apologize occasionally, and do it sincerely, will be trusted.