

# Sorry seems to be the hardest word

## Oops, I screwed up...! WHAT TO DO?

Do you remember Elton John's song "Sorry seems to be the hardest word"? It's a beautiful song with an even more powerful message. Both in our private as well as in professional life, to say sorry when you made a mistake seems to be the hardest thing to say! Why? Probably because our assumed self-confidence is not that strong as we would like others to believe. Saying sorry means you admit you made a mistake and that makes you feel vulnerable, right? So we tend to make up silly excuses, to reason us out of the problem, or just ignore and hope all will turn good again. Well, it won't. The moment you screw up, the other person might feel hurt, might feel badly treated, and all this person needs is a sincere apology. Yet, when this apology does not come, the person gets more and more angry, and maybe even builds up a revengeful attitude towards you. And that certainly is not what you want. How to deal with a "screw-up" from your side? There are three R's:

- Regret
- Reason
- Remedy

And if you communicate your mistakes according to these principles in a sincere way, you can get away grandly with any mistake you might make some.

Want some examples?

1. Being one hour late at an important meeting.

I am terribly sorry I am one hour late (regret) and I can imagine you must be irritated as you probably have a busy day (empathy). I left too late from my house and I had a very urgent family matter to solve with one of my children (must be the real reason!). If you are now under a big time pressure I suggest inviting you for lunch/dinner or that I wait for you when you have time again during the day (Remedy). Now you are forgiven.

2. You will not reach your deadline for the presentation.

I am very sorry that I have to inform

you that I will not be able to meet the deadline (regret). Because of other pressing issues I had no choice of changing priorities (Reason). What I would like to suggest is that Martin will help me for the coming days. I already talked to him and it is ok for him to spend tomorrow evening and the weekend in order to finish the presentation in time.

Using the 3 R's (Regret, Reason, Remedy) works best if you are honest. To show genuine regret, to be honest with the reason and to offer an effective remedy.



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dy. Providing solutions need a pro-active attitude.

Another way of effectively dealing with mistakes is, first of all, to be grateful for your own mistakes. Mistakes are the most valuable learning moments enabling you to improve. Mistakes are nothing more, and nothing less than powerful, encouraging signals for improving your skills.

When we face big problems or challenges, we tend to offer the other party solutions immediately. This will rarely settle the conflict. When things are heated-up, the solution of conflicts lay in empathy. Show first empathy in order to understand the other point of view, and to make sure that the other side knows that you really understand them. The next step could be a description of the conflict and add a positive meaning to it. And only then you can offer solutions.

Let me illustrate this with an example: Imagine one of the ministers in the government is being accused of corruption. And the Prime Minister makes a public statement. He starts first with **Empathy**: The accusation of corruption of one of my ministers is a very serious thing. It puts us all, the voter as well as the government, in an embarrassing situation. I regret this very much.

**Positive direction**: As you know my government is committed and passionate about making this beautiful country a proud and strong nation and we will use this event to proof to the world that we can deal with this problem and any other problem the way, you as our voters, expect from us. So that you know you can rely upon us.

**The solution**: I have talked with our minister and we have agreed that he will step back from his duties during their investigation, which we already started. Next week we expect the results and I will come back to you. We also are examining measures how we can effectively prevent any of such happenings in the future.

When dealing with conflicts and mistakes you always have two choices. You can lose or you can win. It is up to you. If you are willing to use this powerful 3-step approach you turn every conflict into a positive event, strengthening your position as you earn a lot of goodwill. Just make sure that you really act upon your suggested solutions.



This article is written by Gerard Koolen ([Gerard.koolen@lugera.com](mailto:Gerard.koolen@lugera.com)), Managing partner at Lugera & Makler.