

The Clean Slate Method

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Introduction

Apology is like a scalpel, if used correctly it saves lives, loved ones and can cut away years of damage, but used incorrectly and it swiftly severs the heart from the body PERMANENTLY.

Millions, if not billions of dollars have been paid in lawsuits could have been saved with an effective apology.

An Eddie Bauer store that wrongly accused a black teenager, Alonzo Jackson, of shoplifting a shirt he had purchased the day before had to pony up \$85 million in a lawsuit. His dad said that an apology would have sufficed. Eddie Bauer did make a weak public apology. But, they never apologized privately to Alonzo or his father.

But when an apology is done correctly it can truly perform what seems to be a miracle.

I am sure you have heard of many instances where, not only women and men take partners back after affairs, but also where families have forgiven murderers, rapists and many more offenses much more awful than most couples do to each other.

There is a “formula” for an effective apology.

In many instances, this “formula” has proven to be the “turn around point” in healing a relationship.

I have named this “formula” – The Clean Slate Method because it has the power to “wipe the slate clean” so a relationship can begin to heal.

Purpose Of An Apology

Ask most anyone the purpose of an apology and they may tell you that it is to admit that you were wrong.

An admission of wrong doing.

Makes sense because that has been what most of us have been taught, either explicitly or implicitly.

And even the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) tells us "apology" meant a defense, a justification, an excuse.

And that is exactly the way most of us apologize...“I am sorry, BUT...”

And it is EXACTLY why we are in so much hot water and pain in many of our relationships. And we live the following nightmare again and again:

Tom comes home late again, maybe even carrying a dozen roses...

"I am sorry I am late"

"Saying you are sorry ain't going to cut it" Carol sneers and "the flowers aren't going to work either"

Tom, visibly pissed now...

"I said I WAS SORRY!" ... "What else can I do...damn it?"

(and you know how the rest goes)

Now, if Tom can't make an effective apology for being tardy, what are the odds he can apologize for bigger transgressions?

So, I want you to try and consider a different purpose of an apology. One that will be way more effective for you and that is...

Taking Responsibility for a Rift In The Relationship

Let's replay the Tom and Carol scenario.

(Tom has been staying late at the office due to layoffs. Tom is fearful for his job too. And arrives home an hour late for the 3rd time this month.)

Tom: (Walking in the door) *You must be so frustrated with me, angry and hurt.*

Carol: *I am frustrated and a little angry.*

Tom: *I understand. I feel so threatened at work and I am letting that get in the way of our relationship. I have promised you I would be home by Six and I keep letting you down.*

Carol: *Well, I do know that there is a lot of stuff going on at the office.*

Tom: *thanks, but it is really not an excuse...I want you to know that I feel so terrible for letting you down. Maybe, we need to talk about this some more?*

(and they sit down and talk, instead of having an argument)

What is really important too is that Tom never says he was WRONG for being late. He says how he feels and that he is responsible for the rift in the relationship.

See the difference.

So part of the learning and taking advantage of the power of The Clean Slate Method is to undo our past programming on the purpose of an apology and beginning to accept the "new" purpose of **Taking Responsibility For The Rift In The Relationship**.

How To Go From “Bad” To “Worse”

Before we get into the “what to say”. Here are some old apology habits and mistakes that you do not want to make. You will take your problems from bad to worse at 70 MPH if you make the following MISTAKES:

- Too much emphasis on who’s right and who’s wrong. Remember our new definition. Accept responsibility for the rift. Are you trying to save face? Or save your relationship?
- Insincerity (Just trying to placate). This is a knee jerk response that is hazardous to our relationships. Do NOT fire off a barrage of “I am sorry...buts”. This only adds fuel to the fire.
- Expecting and even demanding complete forgiveness. This is so big we will talk about it some more.
- Expecting the other party to admit their wrong doing. Often times using The Clean Slate Method the other person will admit to “wrong doing” ...but you can not EXPECT this. Remember, YOU HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RIFT. That means if your partner had the affair, you have to take RESPONSIBILITY. Very often, they will take their share too. But once again...It is a mistake and The Clean Slate Method will NOT WORK if you EXPECT and/or DEMAND them to take responsibility for their share.
- Apologizing too soon. The bigger the transgression, the longer you should wait to apologize. It would seem insincere and placating to offer an apology minutes after your affair is discovered. Make sense?

The Clean Slate Method

The mindset- The mindset is most important. It is what we have already discussed. If you have the right mindset, the words will go a long way to working themselves out.

1. **Acknowledge** how the other person feels! This means you need to take some time putting yourself in their shoes. Be careful not to say...I know how you feel...because this will likely offend them right away and it doesn’t really acknowledge their feelings in any way. It’s a cop out and the easy way out to just say “I know how you feel” ...what you want to do is:

Say...You must feel so _____ and _____.

Nobody will ever be mad when you are exploring how they feel. In fact, many times they will try and help you.

In fact, if a person is mad and you say...

You must be so angry...

They *may* say...

Well, I wouldn't say angry... maybe just a little upset

Or...

They may say...

I am beyond angry...I am hurt...

Either way you both come out ahead BECAUSE you have a better understanding of their feelings and they feel heard and acknowledged.

2. **The Why?** This is usually first and foremost on their mind. For example, if you were late or if you made a promise you didn't keep or you had an affair...

They want to know why?

This is very dangerous ground if you are not in the right mindset as we discussed. You have to take responsibility for the rift! Let me say that again...**You have to take responsibility for the rift.**

You do this by examining your feeling or behavior that was responsible for the rift

Let's take a really tough scenario...

Let's say Carol has an affair and Tom is the one who wants to heal the relationship. Okay? It was Carol not Tom that had the affair...But, Tom is taking responsibility for the rift...

So what is the feeling and/or behavior Tom had that caused the rift. The rift that contributed to the affair.

So Tom may say...

-You must have felt (feel) so alone and unloved. (step 1) * more conversation may ensue.

-(step 2)I felt so unsecure of our financial future and unsure of my ability as a provider that I put work before our relationship...before us....before our family. I totally left you alone to fend for yourself emotionally.

NOW...IMPORTANT! What may happen at this point...is that Carol may burst into tears (and Tom too) because this is the first time she has felt heard and/or acknowledged. This may be the start of a catharsis and healing of the relationship.

No matter what happens Tom needs to continue to step 3

3. Let them know you were **AFFECTED** too. IMPORTANT: Not by what THEY did...but by what YOU are taking responsibility for.
From the example above:

Tom might say:

I feel so much pain and feel so guilty that I was responsible for you feeling all alone. I feel so lonely now too. My insecurity has caused the loss of my best friend, my lover and my wife.

4. Offer your apology WITHOUT DEFENSE. What does that mean? Simply to apologize expecting nothing in return. Realizing that your apology may not be enough for them. That you are vulnerable. What happens is totally up to them and okay. That they may not forgive you now or in the future.

This is the most powerful step of them all. It is the step that has the power to truly wipe the slate clean. But, you can't EXPECT IT. Does that make sense?

Continuing with our example:

Tom may say:

Carol, I know there are no words that can make up for the loneliness I caused. While I pray for your forgiveness I do not and can not expect it. I am truly sorry.

Now, let's summarize the method ...

1. Acknowledge (their feelings)
2. The Why? (your feeling or behavior that was responsible for the rift)
3. You are affected too. (by what you did, not them)
4. Apologize without defense.

And most importantly remember the MINDSET.

The Clean Slate Method is very powerful. I also encourage you use it on a daily basis. But, if you are arguing with a friend about politics and it gets really heated...they are going to think you are ready for the nut house if you use all 4 steps.

That is too much. Just use the first two steps.

“You must be aggravated with me. My passion for my own beliefs has made it hard for me to completely understand yours. If it has created trouble I apologize. My relationship with you is more important than if we happen to agree or not.”

Many times for small infractions, the first two steps are all that is needed. Please understand this can have a profoundly positive effect on ALL of your relationships and keep you and your reunited partner HAPPY once you have got back together.

It is our small transgressions that build up day after day that can really erode our relationships with our friends, coworkers, bosses, children and lovers.

This gradual erosion finally gives way to a full blown landslide that needs serious repair. Try to remember the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The Important Conclusion

I would highly suggest that you commit The Clean Slate Method to memory. But, even for those who can store data like a camel stores water many times in the heat of the moment we can't recall the right words.

This is where understanding the mindset and focusing on the relationship and not being right or wrong will save you.

Coming from the right place in your heart will get your relationship back on track faster than carefully crafted words.

Use common sense. If she just found out you killed her mother. You will probably DON'T WANT apologize right away. (Remember the bigger the mistake/transgression the longer you should wait to apologize.)