

Welcome to A Deep Dive, I'm Reggie.

In this episode, the apology. What does it mean to apologize and why is it so hard for many of us to offer a sincere apology and why are most public figures and corporate entities so terrible at apologizing?

Thanks for joining me for Apologies.

When was the last time you had to apologize? How did it feel? How much thought did you put in it? Was it easy or did you have to steel yourself?

When I say apologies, I don't mean the thousands of small apologies we offer day in and day out for being a bit late or crashing our supermarket carts into someone's cart. I mean those gatherings of the spirit, digging deep apologizes.

Apologies often have specific cultural aspects to them, for the sake of this episode, I'll be referring to the United States and how the apology is used here with a few British examples.

In the USA phrases like, "I owe you an apology" "It was all my fault" "I screwed up, I sorry" "Please, forgive me" and "I'm sooooo sorry."

Then there are variations of this well-known defensive apology, "If I offended you, I apologize."

Webster dictionary defines an apology as an expression of remorse or regret for having said or done something that harmed another. The word apology has an interesting history and that original meaning often appears in many of the public and corporate apologies that have become well known as the non-apology.

The word apology comes from late Latin through Greek. The word Apologia (or Apologa as it is pronounced in the USA) I like the British pronunciation.

Apo means "away from or off" and logia - means "speech."

An apologia is a defense of one's actions. An argument in the philosophical sense to defend or prove your point. In the trial, as part of his defense, he made the now-famous statement, "An unexamined life is not worth living."

In 399 BCE Socrates was tried and sentenced to death for corrupting the youth of Athens. In his trial, Socrates offered an apologia, a defense of his methods and ideas. He wasn't asking for forgiveness, he was explaining, teaching if you will, those who were sitting in judgment of him about his methods.

Plato, a former student of Socrates supposedly, attended the trial and subsequently wrote the Apology of Socrates in an effort to proclaim Socrates' innocence while putting the Socratic method on display in his work The Apology of Socrates.

My favorite part of the apologia is when Socrates admonishes the members of the panel sitting in judgment of him to not interrupt him. Not a great way to sway folks to your side but hey.

So, when did the word apology first show up in English?

Previously, scholars thought the first use of the word was in 1533 in a letter by Thomas More, but an earlier reference has been found to have been written for Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's use in 1526 in the court of Henry VIII the sentence reads, "Here is an apology made for the defense of the French King."

A note in Webster's Dictionary says if you encounter an *apology* anywhere in the 16th-century chances are very good that the word is indicating a defense or justification.

This is quite satisfying to me because we westerners are often accused of stripping words of their meaning and it's good to know at least we in the U.S. didn't invent the practice.

The apologia or apology of the 16th century had been stripped of its philosophical meaning, used instead as a formal public statement, crisis management tool. Sound familiar?

I should insert here that apologies have a long and sometimes strange history in religion, but that subject could take up an entire podcast so I've left religion out of this conversation.

The word sorry comes into the English language about a decade earlier than the word apology in Middle English in the word sory and serig.

There are so many kinds of apologies that I couldn't fit them into one episode, so I decided to look at two. The public apology and the often more personal moral apology which is something most of us are familiar with.

In their book, *The Apology Impulse*, and how the business world ruined sorry and why we can't stop saying it. The authors trace the history of the corporate apology and how more often than not they fail to achieve their goal. As an offset of the terrible apologies, they start with a terrific apology.

In 1957, in Birmingham, England Mr. RM Hosking found himself using his to-be father-in-law's trousers instead of the mourning suit he ordered. His suit had never shown up, so it was a shirt, tie, and borrowed pants instead. Aside from that, the wedding went off without a hitch.

Apparently, he wasn't the only person without the proper wedding attire. The government had made a change in tax law, a change that would allow married couples who married before April to claim an additional tax credit. March was already the most popular month to marry so when 80,000 more couples than usual got married in March of 1957 Mr. Hosking, like many other men that season, wind-up in a suit-less ceremony. A few weeks after Hosking's wedding he received a letter from HN Moss, managing director of Moss Bros. & Co. ([Letter Here](#))

Dear Sir,

***Words fail me to express the humility in which I stand for the disgraceful way you were let down. This is the first time such a thing has happened in the history of the Firm, and I can only say that the orders received were phenomenal. You are very moderate in your espressions [sic].***

***Your fee for breach of contract is inadequate – I enclose an extra £5 and ask you and your wife to have a bottle or two of wine on my House, to make up in a small way for our lapse. I offer my sincere apologies to you and your wife.***

***Yours faithfully,***

***H N Moss***

***Managing Director***

I love Mr. Moss's apology. Part of what makes this apology meaningful for me is the thing that makes most public corporate apologies fall flat. Mr. Moss takes such personal responsibility that he goes beyond the formal company one.

Taking personal responsibility is key and in spite of the Supreme Court ruling corporations are not people.

I offer as proof one of the worst corporate apologies ever.

In 2014 a Chevron fracking well exploded in Pennsylvania, killing one and injuring another. Keep that in mind and then add to it the potential threat to residents in the area and the possible damage to the environment. Keeping all of that in mind, ask yourself what is the appropriate level of apology that the residents should receive?

Whatever you come up with is not what they got. You know what they got?

They received gift certificates for pizza and soda. Pizza and soda as compensation for fires that burned for four days.



Chevron Community Outreach Team  
Chevron Oil Ref. Div. 1-877-847-8408

February 16, 2014

Dear Neighbor,

We are sorry to have missed you. We wanted to provide you with a status update on the February 11 incident that occurred on Chevron Appalachia's Lancoe 7 H well pads in Dunkard Township and see if you had any questions or concerns that we could address.

Chevron recognizes the effect this has had on the community. We value being a responsible member of this community and will continue to strive to achieve incident-free operations. We are committed to taking action to safeguard our neighbors, our employees, our contractors and the environment.

If you have any concerns, please call our toll-free community line at 1-877-847-8408.

Thank you,

Chevron Community Outreach Team



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<https://thephagroup.com/insights/5-best-worst-brand-apologies/#:~:text=Arguably%20one%20of%20the%20worst,d%20like%20my%20life%20back%E2%80%9D>

This happened in 2014 and they couldn't even be bothered to do a basic mail sort so that the letter was a little more personalized. Besides that, the certificate entitles the holder to one large pizza, the special combo pizza, only and a 2-liter soda. Then the letter ends without a personal signature but a Chevron Appalachia Community Outreach thank you.

As the authors of Impulse book say it isn't as if we don't know how to apologize, we've been doing long before there were words for it. So what's the problem? Why are public apologies so bad?

The answer seems to come down to risk of financial exposure, money, and the unwillingness to take personal responsibility as Mr. Moss did. for the failure as in the case of Mr. Moss. Despite the Supreme Court ruling, corporations are not people. Made up of people who more often than not opt for the apology/nonapology instead of shouldering the responsibility for the harm caused.

Nowadays, and by that I mean for the last 50 years or so, big public apologies are managed by a team of people, written and rewritten, rehearsed and polished to a fair-thee well, and still, most of them stink.

In the middle of a break from filming, The Ellen Show was besieged with claims that Ellen Degeneres ran a hostile workplace. Several of the tv crew claimed that one of the producers repeatedly sexually harassed them, others claimed they weren't allowed medical leave despite some pretty terrible injuries. Several black women claimed that they were with comments like, "Oh, do you work here? Sorry, I only know the white ones." Though her name is on the show Degeneres claims she had no idea what was going on.

Just a few days ago, on the occasion of her show's 18th season, Ellen offered a terrible press managed apology that was in turns overly self-referential, defensive, and oddly streaked with humor. It all felt like a managed way to just get past this public embarrassment. For her staff stake, I hope behind the scenes apologies were more fulsome.

<https://youtu.be/Egn3CuQRHW8>

Degeneres's apology exposes what most often makes the celebrity apology so terrible. Like the corporate apology, there's the risk of financial exposure combined with damage to the celebrity's brand, which also means money.

There's an added element, the need to be liked on a global scale. Being liked and well thought of is a natural human desire but when that need becomes disabling it can cloud your ability to be open and honest and in some cases, it can obscure your capacity for empathy.

When it comes to positive perceptions and stagecraft apologies what about governmental apologies? Both the personal apology offered for personal wrongdoings and the apologies offered for historical wrongdoings.

What comes to my mind is President Bill Clinton's denial, "I did not have sex with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." followed by his impeachment for lying. To my knowledge, Clinton has never apologized directly in letter or in-person to Lewinsky, who was a young intern at the WH when she and the President had several sexual encounters in the WH. The scandal continues to prohibit Lewinsky from professional opportunities. I wonder if an apology would have soothed the harm caused by the fallout?

In 1988, Ronald Reagan apologized and signed the Civil Liberties Act for the internment of Japanese families. During World War II, 120,000 Japanese-Americans and permanent residents were forced to abandon their homes and belongings and ordered to live under guard at several camps scattered throughout the U.S.

As reparations, each family got an apology and \$20,000 per person. In Regan's speech, he said, "No amount of money can compensate for the property loss" He also says in the speech that it's not proper to judge the actions of people then, in a time of war, by today's standards.

What Reagan is doing here is framing the apology. Giving the listener the context in which to absorb his remarks. To my ears both of the examples he uses are absurd.

We judge commanders, nation-states, and on the ground soldiers by their conduct during wartimes and after all the time. This, “It was a different time” argument is really gettin on my nerves. At the time, at risk of their freedom, there were actively vocal Japanese and non-japanese Americans screaming from the rooftops that imprisoning American citizens was wrong. No vantage point needed. It was wrong then and now.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/08/09/210138278/japanese-internment-redress>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/18/us/japanese-internment-camps-apology.html>

When put in context this apology fairs a bit better than most because shortly after Reagan's apology the state of California apologized and as California was the primary abuser of Japanese families it added weight to the national apology. Finally, in 2018, when the Supreme Court [threw out a notorious decision](#) from 1944 that upheld the interments. In the decision, the court wrote, “it was gravely wrong the day it was decided, and it has been overruled in the court of history, and — to be clear — ‘has no place in law under the Constitution.’”

Put the three together and for me, you have a decent apology marred by the poultry sum the USA gave each person.

When you get into this area you can't avoid the mother of all apologies in the US after apologizing for the genocidal treatment of native populations, you have the question of reparations for slavery and its fallout. This topic is so huge, involving entire reconciliation committees and reparations, I won't even attempt to approach it here. Rep. Steve Cohen, a Democrat from Tennessee [July 29, 2008](#).

I'll let this newly discovered sound clip of Martin Luther King speak powerfully for itself. <https://youtu.be/9N-m9RcZGkc?t=127> (I'LL SHARE THE WHOLE CLIP ON THE DD SITE.)

1963	USA -African Americans compensation for the exploitation and humiliation of the Negro in American down through the centuries	The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, “No amount of gold could provide adequate compensation for the exploitation and humiliation of the Negro in American down through the centuries.” Yet he calls for compensation for unpaid wages.	King, M. L. Why We Can't Wait. 1963. p150-2.
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As children, we are constantly told to apologize but we're not taught how to apologize. The apology becomes a negotiation for children. Say the magic words and you're back in the good graces of your parents. Dr. Robert M. Gordon says most adults never leave this stage. The stage of apologizing to get something rather than apologizing to give something.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7vP01U8qr4>

### **Gordon says there are three:**

1. Acknowledgment. That starts with the word I. "I'm sorry, I was wrong..."
2. Remorse and Empathy. "I'm going to work to be a better person whether you forgive me or not."
3. Restitution. In relationships this means rebuilding trust, defining what that means with your partner or friend.

Most of us have no practice receiving apologies either. Growing up no one apologized to children. Not our teachers or parents. No one in authority apologized to children, but maybe that's changing.

Not very long ago I was in a coffee shop that sold sandwiches and desserts and there was a family behind me with two children, one a baby in arms and the other was maybe four or five years old.

I could hear his parents telling him to choose what he wanted, which I think they regretted immediately, as I heard the dad say don't touch all of them just pick one. This was followed by a firm little voice saying, you told me to pick now you're telling me not to touch. So adorable, but it was the parent's response that caught me off guard. The mother said that's right I'm sorry I did tell you both of those things I'm sorry that it was confusing.

Apologizing is a part of learning to be empathetic and like teaching anything most folks only teach the things they were taught. My mother didn't apologize for her decisions that affected the household but you could see her softening as she sensed you're upset. My Air Force father never felt the need to apologize which was true to his upbringing and the fear of appearing weak.

Sorting through all the research I've found it's clear that loving relationships between close friends, lovers, married folks can be damaged beyond repair when no apology is forthcoming after an injury.

That seems obvious but what surprised me more was that studies have found that holding on to sustained trauma in relationships where they are not acknowledged can cause physical symptoms like headaches, nauseous, and a general sense of being out of balance physically.

In 2016 Author Roy Lewicki and his co-authors conducted two experiments at Ohio State University with 755 people asked to react to apologies containing anywhere from one to all six of these elements: expression of regret; explanation of what went wrong; acknowledgment of responsibility; declaration of repentance; offer of repair; and request for forgiveness.

Their findings showed that the most important component is an acknowledgment of responsibility. Say it is your fault, that you made a mistake,” Lewicki said. This sounds a little too much like a strategy, leaving aside the most important aspect of a sincere apology and that YOU.

Any sort of sincere apology starts with us. Before you can offer a sincere or more clinically speaking, a successful apology you have to dig deep. Have a chat with the person in the mirror. Take a measure of your own sense of right and wrong and then decide you have to apologize because it’s the right thing to do. Hey if you decide that was a rotten thing I did and I know they might be upset, but dag it, I got nothing to feel sorry for.

All of the reading I’ve done on the subject says, don’t apologize, because it’s not going to be a sincere apology. And that’s the point. It comes deep within you guided by your sense of right and wrong, not as some work-shopped strategy.

### **The three rule ingredients for an apology.**

1. **Regret:** *statement of regret for having caused the hurt or damage*
2. **Responsibility:** *acceptance of responsibility for your actions*
3. **Remedy:** *a statement of willingness to remedy the situation*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200207/the-power-apology>

Whether the person receiving the apology accepts it is a whole other story. It starts with you and in a sense, it ends with you. Acceptance is the cherry on the cake.

For non-apologists, saying "I’m sorry, I apologize" carries psychological ramifications that can run pretty deep, for some it elicits fundamental fears of vulnerability. And let’s face it, it does require vulnerability, that a lack of defensiveness seems to key any successful apology.

To be able to admit that we’ve done something wrong requires a certain level of [self-esteem](#) or ego strength. People who are deeply insecure can find it challenging to say I’m sorry in part because a single mistake has the power to obliterate their self-worth. The idea that they could make a mistake and still be a valuable and good person is unthinkable for someone whose self-esteem is severely lacking. An apology is an admission of fallibility, which can trigger the vast reservoir of inadequacy and



[shame](#) they carry and thus threaten the fragile narrative they've constructed about themselves. For a person with a damaged sense of self-worth, acknowledging error can be tantamount to annihilation.

So, too, there's the person who was blamed relentlessly as a child, who from a young age was told they were responsible for every problem that arose and punished accordingly.

Years ago my pal Nina said to me, You know reg, sometimes you can be really defensive. I responded defensively, "Me, defensive." Those of us who feel we've dug deep are the worst to confront with these types of revelations. The more I thought about it I thought hmmm she's right. Over the years I've become increasingly less self-defensive.

### Brené Brown - Embracing Vulnerability

Brene Brown has studied vulnerability for years. Brown says vulnerability is the key to empathy and empathy is vital to everything, from creativity and innovation to love.

I love this quote:

"Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage."

A few years ago, my father and I had not spoken for some time then one night the phone rang and it was him.

He called me to tell me among other things that he didn't think he was going to make it out of the hospital this time. I did that thing we do trying to contain the disclosure with, oh, don't say that pop...In the flow of that conversation, he referenced the breach that had happened between us and with a fair amount of ease and as if he had been doing it his entire life he apologized to me. He told me that the silence between us was all his fault. Ended by saying he loved me and was so proud of me and my sisters, who he was in touch through our disconnection. It wasn't a long apology but it felt deeply sincere and I was terribly moved to receive it then and since.

I thanked him and could hear his relief. In some way, that phone call and apology have gone a long way in repairing my feelings towards him and my memories of him. It and the letting go of the past have allowed me to see him more fully and to think of him with a great deal more empathy. So, thanks pop.

Here's what I'd from life and from researching this episode.

Don't apologize unless you mean it and if you do decide to apologize go deep, bear your soul. Don't worry about the outcome. Apologies are about giving something heartfelt not getting something ego soothing.

You might be surprised how many little wildflowers start springing up.

Music

If you'd like to see the best and the worst apologies along with written apologies that deserve to be seen you can find them all at the Deep Dive website at

<https://reggiedeepdive.com/adeeperdivepod/>

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Thanks to Joshua Rich for the podcast theme. You can find a link to his music on the Deep Dive website. Apologies was researched and written by me Reggie

Thanks for listening.

See ya next time.