

Apology Part II: Accepting an apology

Last month, I wrote about the ethics of apologies. I suggested then that everyone makes mistakes, and sometimes they are minor and, of course, sometimes they are major. There is value in understanding how to and when to step up to the plate and sincerely apologize.

On the other hand, there are times when the other person or company has made a mistake, and wants to apologize. One good way to look at that is to ask this: If I had made the mistake that the other person made, would I want him to accept my apology? If so, what can't I do the same for him? The "Golden Rule" can be very helpful in that kind of situation.

An ethicist named Dr. Bruce Weinstein¹ has thought about this and he has suggested the following ideas which are worth considering when an apology is about to be made to you:

- If someone has done something wrong and apologizes to you, accept the apology graciously. However...
- You are also justified in expecting the person to avoid repeating the behavior that required an apology in the first place.
- Depending on the situation, you might need to make clear to the other person what the consequences will be if he or she makes the mistake again.
- "Three strikes and you're out" is fine for baseball, but in other areas, it may take only one strike for someone to be justifiably banished from being a player. Some mistakes are so serious that you should not grant a second chance. For relatively minor slipups, however, or if the task at hand is unusually difficult, it might be unfair not to allow more than three opportunities to get it right.
- If the apologist continues making the same mistake over and over, you may have to say, perhaps regrettably, "I can't in good conscience give you another opportunity to slip up," no matter how much that person continues to apologize.

Of course, people can disagree about this topic. The important thing, however, is to think about it before you expect an apology to be made to you so that the matter can be addressed dispassionately and with care.

¹ Bruce Weinstein, *The Ethics of Apologies*, Bloomberg Businessweek, June 21, 2007.