



Sorry

Sincere apologies, saying you are sorry and trying to do better are essential ingredients in helping us produce and live in a civil society.

BY JIM CAMPBELL

Canadians have a reputation for being very polite, for saying “Please,” “Thank you” and “Excuse me” and “Sorry.” We say “sorry” a lot.

We are quick to say sorry for every little error we make. We even say sorry when someone bumps into us, steps on our toes, or calls our telephone number by mistake. We even say sorry when we have to complain about bad service or major problems. Visitors from far away are surprised at how often we say sorry when it is perfectly obvious we haven't

done anything to apologize for.

Why accept blame when we've done nothing wrong? Well, it is a way we have worked out to smooth out the bumps of everyday life, it's a pre-emptive strike to defuse the possibility of conflict or confrontation.

It is a Canadian thing. It is okay with us if other people find our quickness to say sorry amusing. We do it because it works. It probably contributes to the fact that in Canada we have a less confrontational way of life than people living in many

other places. I suspect we'd have a lot less road rage if our autos were equipped with a blinking green light we could put on to say "sorry!"

Of course, saying sorry is not always about being polite or avoiding confrontation. Saying sorry when you have done something wrong can be a major step in healing and rebuilding a relationship.

Apologies help us to deal with life's inevitable blunders and conflicts.

However, some apologies fall on deaf ears and some can reek with insincerity.

There's the quick sorry given by someone caught red-handed. You know their only regret is getting caught. Their only plan is that next time they'll be careful not to be caught.

And there is the reluctant sorry given simply to stop the criticism, to defuse the injured one's anger. Behind such an apology is a conviction that the major problem is not what they have done but it's society's, silly moralistic attitudes, your lack of understanding, or of tolerance, or a sign of your lack of a sense of humour.

And what about the sorries you have heard over and over. Saying sorry loses its currency if people never learn from their mistakes, never cease doing the things that hurt.

Some people are pros at twisting things around to set themselves as the victim. "Look, I said I'm sorry. What else do you want?" Translated that means: "Sure I made a mistake. I'm not perfect but you are worse than I am! The problem now is not that I keep on doing what I do, the problem is you have stopped forgiving me."

Saying sorry, like just about anything else in life, it can be pretty muddled. We feel a valid apology should be accom-



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panied by some recognition that what was done had hurt, damaged a relationship, spoiled the atmosphere or caused collateral damage. We don't expect people to make a public apology, to don "sackcloth and ashes," but some signal that there is an understanding of the hurt helps a lot.

We also agree that an apology should come with an intention to do better, to be more aware of others' feelings, and with a plan not to repeat doing things that produce disruption and hurt.

Sincere apologies, saying you are sorry and trying to do better, are essential ingredients in helping us produce and live in a civil society.

However, there is an enduring belief that there is a logical connection between an apology and forgiveness, that forgiveness is supposed to follow an apology like night follows day. No one has to forgive. You can be remorseful and reform your ways, but that doesn't turn forgiveness into a demand note to be called in for payment. Forgiveness is always a gift. Whenever it is given, at the first embarrassed attempt at an apology or after a long process of self-examination and reform, it is always a gift.

Thus, all the apologies and regrets that arise in life are not as important in healing as the gift of forgiveness.

So in the end it is only the injured, the victim, that can heal a broken relationship. Makes you think, doesn't it? Sorry to have to remind you of that. ✨

■ *Jim Campbell is an Oakville, Ont., writer. Comments are welcome via post (268 Lakeshore Rd. E. # 604, Oakville, ON L6J 7S4) or e-mail to homedigesteditor@sympactico.ca.*