



Art of Selling...

By **Art Waskey**

HOW SINCERE WAS YOUR APOLOGY?

A customer was extremely upset with us recently because they had run out of product again. The rep that handles the account had forgotten to enter the order into our system. He told me that he had asked the customer to forgive him, but the customer wasn't willing to accept his apology. The rep confided to me, "the customer still trusts me, but I can sense that he feels my apology was insincere."

Why is it that sometimes, as sincere as our apology may be, the offended party just doesn't seem to accept it? Perhaps we are not talking in the customer's *apology language*.

In their book, *The Five Languages of Apology*, Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas conclude from their research that there are "five languages of apology." For most people, one or two of these speak more deeply of sincerity than the others. For an apology to be accepted, you need to speak the appropriate language(s) that conveys to the offended party your sincerity. Here are the authors' five apology languages:

1. **Expressing Responsibility, "I am Sorry"** — "You were promised a service that we have not provided. I am sorry that our company clearly dropped the ball this time."
2. **Accepting Responsibility, "I was wrong"** — "I know how we represented ourselves was wrong. I could try to excuse our company, but there is no excuse."
3. **Making Restitution, "What can I do to make it right?"** — "Is there anything I can do to make up to you for what I have done?"
4. **Genuinely Repenting, "I'll try not to do it again"** — "I let you down by making the same mistake again. What would it take for you to begin to rebuild your trust in me?"
5. **Requesting Forgiveness, "Will you please forgive me?"** — "I promise you I will try never to do that again. And I want to ask you if you will please forgive me."

"... each person has a primary apology language ... if you don't speak that person's language, they may consider your apology weak and unacceptable; that's why sometimes even though you apologize, the customer may continue to be irate and will likely not return to your establishment. Therefore, the best apology needs to include all of these languages."

While the rep had expressed his sincere apology ... "I am sorry," and had accepted responsibility by stating, "I was wrong," he had failed in three areas: to express a desire to make restitution, to be genuinely repentant, and to request forgiveness.

Drs. Chapman and Thomas tell us that "while many companies and professionals have seen the value of apologizing to customers and clients, few have made an effort to train their employees on how to express a sincere apology." Keep this list in a convenient spot for the next time you need to validate the sincerity of your apology.

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