

LEADERSHIP OF PEOPLE & CULTURE | The Art of Apology

In the midst of a leaders' coaching session focused on how leaders engage in difficult conversations with their teams, I began to notice a theme. These leaders were frustrated with the lack of ownership for bad attitudes on the part of some of their team members. Interestingly, I also sensed that they may not be taking ownership of their own attitudes with these frustrating team members.

So, I asked a couple of questions:

*Have you ever delivered a bad attitude in response to a team members' bad attitude?
What did you do when you realized you responded in like bad manner?*

Most in the group had not done anything regarding their negative response. Then another question was asked:

When is the last time you offered an apology to someone whom you wronged?

To my very great surprise, over half of the group had never apologized – EVER!! This was a group of leaders with spouses and kids, who were involved in community and entrusted with leadership of people in their businesses. How could this be?

It became clear that something was really wrong! The feeling of unease became palpable as they realized the hypocrisy of what was just confessed. The planned agenda was dropped and I proceeded to teach this group the “Art of the Apology”. Until they were willing to model the way and own their own errors in judgment or attitude, they couldn't expect their team or family members to own theirs. While we all crave being right and in control, this way does not lead to the peace, trust and respect we all desire in our workplaces and homes.

On June 15, 1985, my good friend Luch Del Monte spoke at my wedding. In his charge to me and my bride (and later to all four of my children at their weddings), he included these 9 words that can change your life, if you let them:

I AM SORRY,
I WAS WRONG,
PLEASE FORGIVE
ME!

Beginning conversations with these 9 words as a framework, and then adding specifics about my wrongs, has brought so much relational ease at work and at home. I cannot imagine where my relationships would be without them.

