

## How to say I'm sorry

This February the airline industry was hit with bad weather which caused serious delays – people stranded on their plane for hours. All airlines said they were sorry, but one company took a different approach. JetBlue's Founder and CEO went on a personal apology tour through the media and talked directly to customers online; he came across as genuine, sincere, and personal. What did he say and how did he say it to make us pay attention?

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "When anyone apologizes to us he has to do it very expertly: otherwise we might easily come to see ourselves as the guilty party and experience unpleasant feelings." The person who says, "I'm sorry, the weather made it impossible for us to provide you with good service" is making an excuse and not offering a good apology. The one who says, "I'm sorry, you have the right to better service and I will write a customer bill of rights to make sure you get it" is offering more.

How can we make someone understand that we are really sorry? Much has been written about the art and science of apology: the art is the way we communicate it; the science is what we say. There are elements of an apology which, like science, make up a formula for a perfect apology: a *detailed account* of the situation; an *acknowledgement* of the harm done; taking *responsibility* for the words or deeds; *recognition* of your role; a statement of *regret*; a request for *forgiveness*; a *promise* it won't happen again; and a form of *restitution* when possible. If your apology acknowledges specific events ("I made a bad decision by keeping you on that plane") and the harm caused by you ("I made you uncomfortable"), you validate the other person's feelings. In order to recognize your role ("I could have done better") and take responsibility, you don't make excuses but rather say that your actions, intentional or not, caused harm. Finally you can say you're sorry, offer that it won't happen again and ask for forgiveness. You can ask the recipient if there's something you can do to make it up to them. All of these should be said in a sincere and caring voice.

When you're done your best to apologize, you hope that the other person will forgive you. By making our apology, we can often remedy a relationship; ease our conscience; and move forward.

For our film discussion series this summer, we will explore the theme of apology and forgiveness as depicted in the movies. The group will meet for 5 Tuesdays, from 1 – 3:30 p.m. beginning July 7<sup>th</sup>. For more information, call Kathy Laufer – 617-796-1663.