

*Names have been changed to honor client confidentiality.*

## **An Apology with Pizzaz**

Ben is often puzzled by his wife's hurt feelings. He loves Tracy, and the last thing he wants is to cause her pain. So when she gets hurt over his impatience or some negative comment, he typically responds by saying, "You shouldn't let that bug you."

Instead of making her feel better, by dismissing her feelings Ben merely adds another layer to the original hurt. He's well-meaning—his heart is in the right place—but he's just a little naive. Like many people, he mistakenly believes that a light-handed approach will coax the other person to do likewise. It doesn't work that way.

What works is knowing that our pain matters. When done correctly, apologies provide that acknowledgment. Apologies that make a difference are those we feel in our heart.

I explained to Ben that when Tracey feels hurt, what his brain considers logical or accurate is of minor importance. In fact, the situation is not even a matter of the brain. At those times, his brain needs to go on vacation, allowing his heart to resolve the hurt feelings. Only the heart is capable of doing this.

Ashley, a teenager, is a good example. Her dad laughed at something she said, and when he noticed it hurt her feelings, he apologized—but in a flippant manner. Such hit-and-run apologies, used as a quick fix or a way to get off the hook, don't offer relief. They lack the ring of sincerity and fail to convey remorse.

Amid tears in one of our sessions, Ashley strived to make her dad understand. "It isn't enough to just apologize," she stressed. "I need to know my feelings matter to you!"

Ashley did a beautiful job of pointing out that words alone don't cut it. Instead of merely hearing an apology being spoken, she needed his heart to be engaged. That makes sense. Emotions are the language between two souls. Her dad can't reach the core of her pain without using the only language souls understand.

The desire for sensitivity and awareness is at the root of wanting an apology. The underlying need is for the offending person to shift to their heart. Whether it be a small scratch or a giant gash, hurt feelings aren't easily cast off until the shift is made. At that point, relief is experienced and the pain lifts, allowing us to move on. The silent outcry of the wounded soul seems to be: When you're sensitive and aware, my pain is released.

"You will eventually hurt those you love because mistakes are inevitable," says Sam Keen, author of [\*To Love And Be Loved\*](#). "You're bound to botch up, including frequently sticking your foot in your mouth."

For this reason, he suggests we become comfortable adding the following words to our everyday vocabulary: "I was wrong; I'm sorry; please forgive me." It seems, though, that in order to express those words, we must sense a receptive heart on the other end. Heart-felt apologies are obstructed and discouraged if the atmosphere is threatening.

Such is the case between Lara and her husband, Carl. When hurt, Lara typically responds by attacking with angry outbursts. An indiscretion on his part prompted them to seek counseling. Profoundly regretful, he desires to make amends. Privately, she suffers inside. In order to heal, she needs to feel Carl's remorse and a restoration of their compassionate connection. But that can't happen as long as she's expressing fury.

"You're good at being angry but poor at expressing your pain," I told her.

In a joint session, I had them face each other as they expressed their feelings. I prompted Lara to come from the pain that underlies her anger. Lara was able to pull it off, thus paving the way for Carl to express his deeply felt remorse. A heart-warming, tearful embrace followed.

Another client, Kelly, demands apologies when she feels wronged by her boyfriend. He apologizes, but not from his heart. Like a little boy being scolded, his only focus is to appease. Kelly doesn't want a little-boy apology, but she helps create one by acting more like a parent than a partner.

Like Lara, Kelly needs to soften into her pain. Doing so improves her chances of receiving the type of apology she needs to shed pain. Clearly, reconnecting requires the sensitivity and vulnerability of both parties involved, because vulnerability is the only place where feelings are heard and where the souls meet.

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