

## The Five Languages of Apology and Downsizing by Jennifer Thomas, Ph.D.

Are you being forced to make tough decisions at work every day? Are you, like many, wondering how your company can continue to make ends meet? What if you have to let some employees go: What role do apologies have in a layoff?

First, let me say that I feel for those on both sides of the layoff dilemma. Being terminated strikes at the heart of our security. Those who remain in the workplace have challenges, too: They may have "survivor's guilt" and a heavier work load.

Seven years ago, my husband was laid off during a bank merger. Despite being able to anticipate that this outcome was likely for his small unit, we were still stunned and terribly saddened when he was officially terminated. I found I was so distracted by the tornado of job searching that it was hard for me to be around others (even at church) whose futures seemed secure. At times we felt like we were wandering through a blizzard -- we could see people enjoying the warmth of their fireplaces through their picture windows while our family was out in the workplace cold.

What was one small comfort during that difficult time? My husband received an apology from the executive over his former division. This individual made a personal connection to communicate his concern and interest for my husband and offering his assistance as my husband pursued a new career. Without compromising

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on the business necessity, this apology conveyed what Gary Chapman and I have termed the first "language of apology." Here are all five of the apology languages:

#### **Apology Language #1**

*Expressing Regret: "I'm sorry"*

Show concern for the other person's feelings. Express sorrow regarding their difficult circumstances. Display empathy and concern for their feelings.

#### **Apology Language #2**

*Accepting Responsibility:*

*"I was wrong"*

Name your mistake and accept fault. Note that it is easier to say

"You are right" than "I am wrong", but the latter carries more weight.

#### **Apology Language #3**

*Restitution- Making Amends:*

*"What can I do to make it right?"*

How are they now? Is any debt owed or repayment due? How shall I make amends to you? Do they need help dusting themselves off and getting back up on their feet? How can I restore your confidence that I care for you- even though my actions were hurtful to you?

#### **Apology Language #4**

*Repentance:*

*"I'll try not to do that again"*

Engage in problem-solving. Don't make excuses for yourself such as: "Well, my day was just so....". Instead, offer what you will change to prevent yourself from putting them in the same predicament again.

#### **Apology Language #5**

*Requesting Forgiveness:*

*"Will you please forgive me?"*

Be patient - they may need time or greater clarification of your prior statements. Finally, your apology may not be accepted, but at least you know that you have

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been faithful in offering a sincere olive branch of peace.

In the corporate world, tough decisions must be made, but these decisions can be humanized by considering this framework and specifically speaking languages 1 and 3 above. While a company cannot apologize in the sense of "wrongdoing" for layoffs, the expression of regret is a valuable gift. Severance or job-seeking assistance can also be important steps in providing some form of "institutional restitution."

Today, I'm glad to say that my husband is enjoying a new job in the investment world. While I would not have chosen this trial, I can see that the Lord has used it to increase my compassion for clients and friends who are enduring job loss, while bringing us to a better place both in my husband's career and in growing our faith.

Whether the next apology you make is at home or at work, please remember this: Sincere apologies are a precious gift. They impart a feeling to the receiver of being deeply valued. Further, they smooth the way to true forgiveness and

reconciliation. May you surprise others with the transparency, humility, and boldness of your apologies!

### TRAINING RESOURCE

You can give and receive sincere apologies! Read *The Five Languages of Apology* by Jennifer Thomas and Gary Chapman to find healing for all your relationships. The book includes a group study guide and a self-assessment tool.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas is a psychologist and motivational speaker. Visit Jennifer's website: [www.drjenthomas.com](http://www.drjenthomas.com) and her workplace blog: [www.drjenthomas.wordpress.com](http://www.drjenthomas.wordpress.com).

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