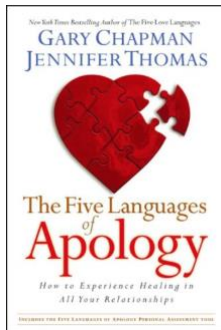


# 'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

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November, 2021

## The Five Languages of Apology

By Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas

### Discussion Highlights

*Presented by Mary Power*

Have you ever done something to upset someone else or hurt their feelings and genuinely apologized only to have that person say, "You are not really sorry?" You again with all sincerity tell them how VERY sorry you are, and still it is not good enough. What was genuine contrition suddenly turns in to anger, and conflict expands. Each side gets more entrenched.

Looking back, you say to yourself, "What just happened? I was genuinely sorry!"

Conflicts in personal friendships and workplaces escalate due to the frustration and rejection around apologies. This book offers insights into why this happens and helps us understand the various languages of apology.

Many people are familiar with Chapman's earlier work based on the idea that each of us has a primary love language, and if that language is not spoken, we do not feel loved. Taken to the next level, Chapman explains that each of us also has our own language of apology, and he walks us through the key elements of each of the 5 languages of apology. The tools provided help us understand the key elements and what is needed to achieve the level of forgiveness and reconciliation we desire in a genuine apology.

The need for apologies permeates all human relationships. Marriage, parenting, dating, work relationships and friendship all require apologies. Without apologies, anger builds and pushes us to demand justice. When justice is not forthcoming, anger builds and can end in fractured relationships or violence. Look at the news today, and you see extreme cases of work and societal anger and violence.

Genuine forgiveness and reconciliation are two-person transactions that are enabled by apologies. Today in virtual work settings the need to be attuned to issues and ready to apologize is even more critical. **Can you think of situations that could have been diffused with a simple, genuine apology?**

When we apologize, we accept responsibility for our behavior, seeking to make amends with the person who was offended. Genuine apology opens the door to the possibility of resetting the relationship and moving to reconciliation. Then you can continue building the relationship. Without apology, the offense sits as a barrier and the quality of the relationship is diminished.

Each of the five fundamental aspects or language of an apology is important, but for a particular individual, one or two may communicate more effectively than all others. The key to a good relationship, whether personal or professional, is learning the apology language of the other person and being willing to speak it. When you fail to speak their language, it makes forgiveness and a reset more difficult because they are not sure if you are genuinely apologizing.

Our natural tendency is to make a genuine apology using the apology language that is important to us. To be effective, you need to learn the apology language of your partner or those you are working with so that you can effectively apologize in their language.

In studies the researchers found that 75% of couples differed in their preferred apology language, so you can only imagine the range of apology languages in a workplace!

The breakdown of the five languages of apology are as follows:

1. **Expressing Regret** - "I am sorry"
2. **Accepting Responsibility** - "I was wrong"
3. **Making Restitution** - "What can I do to make it right?"
4. **Genuinely Repenting** - "I will work not to do it again"
5. **Requesting Forgiveness** - "Will you please forgive me?"

**Expressing Regret** - What most people are looking for in an apology is sincerity. They want the apology to be genuine, but how do you determine sincerity? Therein lies the problem. The evidence of sincerity differs from person to person.

To start, it is critical that you actually say you are sorry. Those are the words most people are listening for. The "I'm sorry" must also indicate that you realize you have hurt or upset them in some way.

"I'm sorry you are feeling hurt" does not count. That absolves you from what you did. You need to say, "I am sorry that I hurt your feelings." Acknowledge their pain and your contribution to that pain.

In work or customer service situations, people often are so focused on remedying a situation that they neglect to acknowledge the person's inconvenience and thus they minimize the solution that they are offering.

#### **Key Elements of Expressing Regret:**

-It is key that your body language agree with the words you are saying. Also, your tone of voice must match your apology. Screaming that you are sorry rarely has a positive effect!

-An apology has more impact when it is specific. The more details you can give, the better.

Focus on your action or inaction and how it impacted the other person.

-Avoid the "but..." Sincere regret needs to stand alone. It should not be followed with anything that takes away from or dilutes first part of your statement.

-Don't expect them to apologize in return. Offer it as your gift to them.

**Accepting Responsibility** - Often a reluctance to admit wrongdoing is tied to our sense of self-worth. To admit you are wrong is often perceived as a weakness to those with low self-esteem. When you take responsibility for your actions you restore respect from those you offended.

Do not make excuses, blame others. Many people need to hear "I was wrong" before they will believe an apology is sincere. They need to know that the person understands what they did was wrong.

**Making Restitution** - This is a concept of reparative damage where if a wrong has been committed it should be "paid for." A person needs to be willing to try to make amends for the pain they have caused another.

For many people that have been hurt they think to themselves, "how could that person do this to me if they genuinely cared about or respected me?" What they want to hear in the apology is assurance that the offender genuinely cares/respects them and wants to demonstrate it. They want to make things right.

It will help you make restitution in a way that means the most to that person. If you know the person's love language of:

1. Words of affirmation
2. Acts of Service
3. Receiving Gifts
4. Quality Time
5. Physical Touch

This is easier to do in personal relationships. **How could you determine someone's recognition language at work?**

**Genuinely Repenting** - That means taking action to show you will not do it again. You need to do something to show you are changing your behavior and will act differently next time. If your negative action was significant, share your plan for change.

**Requesting Forgiveness** - Many people are willing to forgive, but it is important to them that the offender requests their forgiveness and does not assume that if they apologize, the other person will naturally forgive them. To the people that have this language of apology, forgiveness is a gift that they give only if it is requested. When you ask for their forgiveness, you are indicating to them that you want to see the relationship fully restored.

It is key that in your apology you request forgiveness, and do not demand it. Also, you need to acknowledge for significant offenses that the person may need to take some time to forgive you.

Requesting forgiveness is particularly difficult for people with strong controlling personalities or those who fear rejection.

**This language seems quite extreme to many, but the researchers indicate that over 21% of the population feel that without requesting forgiveness, an apology is not sincere.**

The key questions that will help you discover both your own and another person's primary apology language are as follows:

1. What do you expect a person to do or say in order for you to genuinely forgive them? (This may include several apology languages). When someone apologizes to you, what do you want to hear?
2. Think of two or three times when someone wronged you. What hurt you most deeply about this situation? What patterns emerge?
3. When you apologize, which of the 5 languages do you think are most important? Think of recent apologies you have made what did you stress?

Typically, we all have one or two apology languages that are most important to us. If they are not present, we do not feel the other person's apology is sincere.

If you are trying to understand someone else's apology language, ask them to describe an apology that someone gave them that seemed insufficient. In that case, what was lacking? Ask, was there something the person could have said but did not that would have made you feel better? Then ask the person when they express an apology to someone for something hurtful that they have done, what is the most important part of the apology?

**TIP:** If you have offered an apology to someone and you sense the other person has not fully forgiven you, wait a few days and then let them know that their feelings are important to you. Ask them to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how sincere they felt your apology was. If you score anything less than a 5, ask them what you would need to do to bring it up to a 5.

All sincere apologies have the same two goals: that the offender be forgiven, and the relationship be reconciled. When forgiveness and reconciliation occur, the relationship can continue to grow.

Finally, the book gives ideas on how to best apply these languages of apology in the family, the workplace, romantic relationships and in apologizing to yourself and offers sample wording for each of the apology languages.

**About the Book Club** In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).