

When Good Words Turn Bad

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Have you ever been in a situation where you said something and it landed the wrong way? Maybe your word choice was wrong, your tone, or maybe just the context was the wrong setting for the conversation. Now, this is not a super big deal when it's a stranger. Maybe it's the barista at your local Starbucks or the cashier at No Frills. And often, a quick apology is all it takes to diffuse any tension. Maybe laughter follows at the miscommunication and life moves on. But what happens when it's between friends? Between partners? Between family?

I've had these situations. They sometimes keep me up at night wondering if my brain was broken. Re-hashing situations over and over again. Poor word choices, the wrong action taken, and why I did what I did. And why do I sometimes beat myself up over it? Because those little miscommunications can have a lasting impact causing irrevocable damage to my relationships. These missteps can cause a loss of trust between friends, family, and co-workers. Sometimes a loss that cannot be fixed. Sometimes a burned bridge doesn't get re-built. However, crying over spilt milk is wasteful. Why? Because as you cry – it dries and gets stinky and requires more work to clean in the end. So don't cry, move forward.

Here is my advice on how.

Be upfront and own your mistake. While you are not responsible for the reaction of the person who on the receiving end; you are responsible for creating the situation. Take ownership of that both for yourself and for the person who has been harmed. Do this by apologizing sincerely. No one likes an apology that feels empty and devoid of responsibility. Use "I" language. For example: I'm sorry I hurt you with the words I used. That was not my intention, but I understand that they were taken that way and I will do my best to be more considerate going forward.

Next, take some time for self-reflection. Whether it's a few moments or some serious journaling you need to find out if your actions/words came from a place of simple ignorance or something more malicious. It's this kind of introspection that grows you as person, a friend, a partner.

And lastly, take action! There is no point in taking time to apologies, journaling, asking friend for input on your actions and then throwing it all away. Make active decisions to change your language, improve your actions, and be more aware of the feelings and needs of those

around you. It's hard to do this on your own. I find the best way to stay accountable to improvement is to have someone who cares about you keep you focused. Find that friend, or friend group who is as committed to your growth as you are to keep you on track.

It's not always easy admitting fault when we've gone astray, but if we are honest with ourselves and others; commit ourselves to growth in our relationships; our lives, our communities and our world will become a better place.

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(Written by Toni Pettit)

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