

# The Apology Impulse Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Apology Impulse* will help you and your business become more authentic in your relationships with others by identifying how much companies say sorry, why they do, how they get it wrong, and the right way to do it.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



It's only natural and human to say sorry when you've done something wrong. It shows other people that you're aware of your mistakes and are willing to be responsible for them.

Many world religions speak of repentance and parents teach their kids to say sorry almost immediately after they can talk. Apologizing is like a social adhesive that keeps us all close and makes it possible for us to stay in communities.

But recent changes to the world have made it so we're apologizing more than ever. The frequency of our "I'm sorry's" is diluting the meaning of this important communication tool. Some are even twisting its purpose to suit their interests.

How did we get here and what can we do about it? That's exactly what Cary Cooper and Sean O'Meara teach us in *The Apology Impulse: How the Business World Ruined Sorry and Why We Can't Stop Saying It*. This book will help you identify a genuine apology, get the power of saying sorry back, and much more.

Here are 3 curious lessons I've learned from this book:

1. The word "sorry" is losing it's meaning because companies are apologizing too much.
2. Saying sorry means nothing unless you're willing to actually change.

3. It's okay and sometimes even beneficial to not apologize at all.

“Sorry, not sorry” will be a thing of the past after these quick lessons! Let's get right to it!

## **Lesson 1: Companies are apologizing too much and it's ruining the word “sorry” for everybody.**

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American Airlines apologized roughly 200 times per day to customers in just the first part of 2014. Were they in a terrible crisis or something? No, everything was going well. They were just saying sorry for every minor error that came up.

Companies in the same sector as American Airlines have to be careful about customer complaints. That's because it's easy for people to use another company when something goes wrong.

Banks, in contrast, don't have to worry as much about customer service because it's pretty time-consuming for people to change who they bank with.

Social media has made this even worse. **People can go online and share even the smallest slip up a company does with the entire world.** It also gives businesses a place to interact, which usually means they're apologizing too often.

It might sound like a good thing that corporations are owning up to their mistakes but the reality is, it just makes the word “sorry” lose meaning.

Take the grocery chain Tesco, for example. They used the phrase “very sorry” to describe how they felt after giving a customer the wrong medication.

But by using the same words to describe a labeling error on costumes, the company diluted the meaning of “very sorry.”

If you're going to apologize, focusing on quality over quantity has the power to improve your credibility and reputation.

## **Lesson 2: If you want people to take you seriously, you have to show that you'll change every time you say you're sorry.**

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I remember learning when I was young that “sorry” meant that you'll never do it again. When you actually follow through with this, it can have dramatically positive effects on your personal and business relationships.

But when you fail to follow-through and have to keep apologizing, you lose a lot of trust.

Take Mark Zuckerberg, for example. In 2010 the world heard him apologize for privacy issues with the fairly new Facebook. Figuring there were just some growing pains, people forgave him.

But just eight years later in 2018, he had to be saying sorry again for the same privacy problems! His lack of action made his second apology feel awfully hollow.

Contrast this with the actions of JetBlue's CEO David Neeleman after 130,000 customers experienced issues after flight disruptions. **He apologized sincerely and didn't stop with just words but then created an action plan.**

Sharing his "customer bill of rights" in a YouTube video, he outlined what customers would get when their flights were delayed in the future. And he took his commitment seriously by following through and making it actually happen.

Starbucks has a similar example of being exemplary to customers when something goes wrong. The company closed all of its stores to give employees racial-bias training when an employee didn't let two black men use the bathroom because they didn't consider the men to be customers.

### **Lesson 3: Not apologizing is sometimes the best option.**

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A few years ago I worked in a customer support call center for a fairly well-known company. I was excited when I got moved from doing calls to mostly being on emails. It was even more exciting a little later to hear that I would get to work on the social media team.

We managed the Facebook and other accounts for the company and responded to urgent requests. A few times, the site would go down or many customers would have problems at once. We'd try to get to everyone we could, and I'll admit I was probably a little too generous with my apologies.

But one particularly hairy day I learned a lesson I'll never forget. Something had gone wrong and customers were going crazy on Facebook with angry messages.

**I asked my manager how to respond and was blown away when he told me not to say anything.** I couldn't understand how that would help but I trusted him. Sure enough, with time the issue was fixed and people calmed down.

It's often said that the only way to calm muddy water is to leave it alone. I definitely saw the importance of this principle that day at my old job. Sometimes, the best course really is to just do nothing, not even apologize.

Frequently, the loudest people on social media don't actually represent your real customer base. When something goes wrong, take a few deep breaths, find out if you are at fault, then apologize if you are.

But if not, you don't have to respond to the angry voices vying for your attention.

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## **The Apology Impulse Review**

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*The Apology Impulse* is definitely different than a lot of other books I've read. I didn't realize the truth about how much companies say sorry and how it's ruining the word itself and in some cases their reputations. As an entrepreneur, I found this especially insightful to see how I can act with more composure when things go wrong in my companies.

## **Who would I recommend The Apology Impulse summary to?**

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The 35-year-old PR manager that is looking for ways to help their company become more authentic, the 57-year-old executive that knows they are at fault for an error and needs to make it right, and anyone that wonders why companies say sorry so much.