

THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

The Art of the Apology

Do you remember being told—or rather being forced—to apologize as a child? Whether it was with squabbling siblings or kids in the neighborhood, at some point we were cajoled into saying “I’m sorry.” Whether you meant your apology or not was irrelevant; what counted was the gesture.



I’ve been thinking this week about what it means to admit and learn from our mistakes. Netflix CEO Reed Hastings has been getting battered in the media in recent weeks for his poor handling of some major company decisions. Much of the press has centered on his apology, with many saying that it came too late, wasn’t enough, and that it didn’t set things right with customers. People are apparently [upset](#) even about Hastings’ clothing choice, saying he shouldn’t have been dressed so casually in his apology video.

By contrast, I read a [heartfelt piece](#) in the New York Times by a man who, after ten years, received a sincere and genuine apology from a previous employee. I was struck by the fact that, even after all of those years, they both still needed resolution. The article showed the power a meaningful apology can have, by letting people forgive themselves, one another, and allowing them to truly move forward.

I am reminded once again of the importance of recognizing our mistakes—no matter how long it takes—and being able to apologize for poor judgment or behavior. That’s part of what it means to be accountable, and I’ve never met a great leader who didn’t hold herself and others accountable.

Being able to apologize is only the first step though. What matters just as much is what you do next. I’ve met plenty of leaders who’ve agonized too long over past mistakes and been hobbled by them. They doubt their own judgment, become reluctant to trust others, and hesitate to make decisions. As you can imagine, this is not a helpful behavioral response.

Let them go and learn from them

Strength and wisdom come in admitting and learning from our mistakes, and using that knowledge as we move forward. It doesn't mean we won't ever mess up again; it just means that we take that new knowledge with us, enabling us to make better and more informed choices in the future. The key is to learn from your mistakes without letting them weigh you down or hold you back.

The Experiment

- Is there a past mistake that still weighs on you?
- Rather than letting it adversely weigh on you or constrict you, spend some time thinking about the lessons you learned.
- How can that experience guide your future behavior in a positive way?
- Try the Marshmallow Challenge! Open your mind to different ways of thinking and behaving. <http://bit.ly/a4Dfm6>

THE CONVERSATION: Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at donnarae@bright-side.com.

ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit www.bright-side.com or contact Donna Rae at donnarae@bright-side.com.

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