



The Best Advice So Far

Thoughts
on living like
it matters . . .

because
it *does*.

ERIK TYLER

THE BEST ADVICE SO FAR

by

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2nd Edition

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT
The Best Advice So Far

“Congratulations on a very practical, thoughtful and useful book. Great advice ... and compelling. I opened it to skim, but I kept on reading. Nice work. Thank you for what you are doing to change people's lives.”

— **Karen May**
Vice President, People Development
Google

“*Terrific*. Just the right amount of humor, not at all ‘preachy,’ and shows a real understanding of how others might be able to apply the advice.”

— **Bob Halloran**
New York Times **Best-Selling Author**
Irish Thunder and Breakdown

Reviews from other readers across the country:

“You saved my life. Those four words ‘You have a choice’ ... I will never be able to truly express how thankful I am.”

— **Dezi M., State College, PA**

“The Best Advice So Far pulls you in with its relatability. It’s not one author telling you how to live; it’s a journey of shared experiences and insights delivered in a funny, real way that forces you to reflect on your own life in a positive and uplifting manner.”

— **Sullivan C., Denver, CO**

“Filled with insightful and engaging anecdotes, this book certainly lives up to its title. This is an incredible book that you will return to time and time again.”

— **Ryan G., Boston, MA**

“Reading a chapter from The Best Advice So Far is a similar experience to having lunch with a wise and kind best friend. I finish each section simultaneously encouraged and enlightened, but never with the feeling that I’m being lectured to.”

— **Paul H., Dallas, TX**

EXCERPT

CHAPTER 28

APOLOGIES

A shocking amount of English language usage is idiomatic.

I can't help but smirk (and cringe) at the current usage of “literally” to mean “figuratively,” as in “I'm literally burning up” to mean “I'm hot.” Or “I literally died when I heard the news” to mean that one is merely somewhat surprised by it.

Even standard fare such as “I have to go to the bathroom” isn't as straightforward as it may seem at first. Do you *have* anything at all, in the sense of possession, when you say this? I suppose so, but it certainly isn't what we mean, nor is it anything we would probably like to expound upon. Are we merely *going to* the bathroom — walking there and then walking back? Again, this is just an avoidance of the not-so-polite facts of the matter. And does the *bathroom* in every case even contain a bath? Yet it's a good deal better than going the literal route by saying, “I must urinate into the toilet now.”

Idiomatic usage is perhaps the clearest earmark of a proficient speaker, and is both fascinating and necessary. But in many cases (such as the figurative use of “literally”), I fear we've begun to invite proverbial boys to cry wolf. In short, we're making it too easy to not mean what we say.

I'm one of those people who finds myself quoting lines from movies often. It's rarely the "big lines" that stand out to me. I'm more fascinated by the clever tidbits that tend to go largely unnoticed by the masses. In one such movie scene, a brother and sister, on in years, mistakenly wind up with an orphan girl named Anne in their home, having expected to be getting a boy instead. An outspoken neighbor barges in to see what all of this is about. She begins to chastise her friend about the new arrival in third person, as if the girl is not even there. "She's awfully skinny and homely, Marilla. She's certainly nothing to look at. And, her hair!" she gasps in shock. "It's as red as carrots!"

This last twit about the hair is more than the fiery Anne can bear in silence. Eyes bulging, she stomps forward, insolently. "Carrots! How would you like it if someone said that you were *fat* . . . and *ugly* . . . and a *sour old gossip!*"

The neighbor storms off, outraged, putting the matron of the house in a precarious situation, which results in an ultimatum: apologize to the neighbor woman . . . or go straight back to the orphanage. Anne is resolute that she will not apologize. But after some cajoling from Matthew, Marilla's meek and kindly brother, she concedes.

Anne and Marilla make the trek over to the neighbor's porch. Anne kneels down before the neighbor, hands clenched together imploringly. She delivers what proves to be quite a dramatic and self-deprecating apology. As

the conclusion approaches, Anne offers, “What you said about me is true. I am skinny. And ugly. And my hair is red.” After a brief pause, the next line comes out all in a rush. “What I said about you is true, too, only I shouldn't have said it.”

I always laugh at this. After all the rhetoric and theatrics, she finally gets around to saying what she really means. How refreshing.

From the time children are able to utter the words, we make them say they are sorry:

“Tell Timmy you're sorry for throwing the block at his face!”

“Tell grandma you're sorry for pinching her!”

“Tell the cat you're sorry for pulling its tail!”

Of course, these mandates are given with a scowl of disapproval and a stern tone that implies “. . . or else.” And so, in the name of proper manners and with the best of intentions, we teach our tots to say what they do not mean. Over time, the word “sorry” begins to collect other meanings:

“Stop being mad at me.”

“Do what I want you to do.”

“Don't leave me.”

As wonderful and rich as our language is, I recommend revitalizing the words “I'm sorry” by reserving them for times when you mean precisely that.

THE BEST ADVICE SO FAR: Apologize less and mean it more.

Secondary meanings for “I'm sorry” are common among both people users and people pleasers alike. The former mean “let me take advantage of you one more time,” while the latter mean “please don't stop liking me.” Both overuse the phrase. Neither is communicating honestly.

Some good people argue that it would be best to apologize even when you do not believe you are in the wrong, for the sake of “being the bigger person” and keeping the peace. In this case, “I'm sorry” would seem to mean “I care about you, and I'm willing to take the hit so we can get along.” I've changed my views on many things over the years. This is one area in which I have not. I still

believe that an apology should only be made with careful consideration, after some honest self-reflection, and under specific circumstance. This is the only way for the words to reflect true depth of meaning.

These are the guidelines I follow when it comes to making apologies:

Only apologize when I accept responsibility for a wrong done (whether known to the other person or not).

Consider how my actions were or may have been hurtful and express this.

Name the offense specifically when apologizing.

Verbally commit to a change of action or attitude for the next time a similar situation arises.

Ask the other person to forgive me.

Let's see how this might look when applied to a few different situations.

A big advertising campaign is due to be presented Friday, but your part is done and submitted plenty ahead of time. To celebrate, you make plans to have dinner out with your wife Thursday night.

Midday Thursday, you are informed that another department made some significant improvements and changes to the campaign, which will now necessitate that your contributions be entirely reworked. It's going to be a late night. You call your wife to cancel dinner plans. Do you apologize?

If we hold it up to the guidelines I suggest above, we would start by asking, “Do I accept responsibility for a wrong done here?” Given these circumstances, I would say no. Likewise, we cannot name the specific offense for which we are taking responsibility, nor can we commit to doing anything differently should a similar situation occur in the future. So, in this case, an apology is not what is called for. I won't stand on a hill and shout that “I'm sorry, honey, I have to cancel our plans tonight” is the worst thing you could say. Yet I still firmly believe that, in the scope of life, apologies will mean more if we make them less.

What might we say in this case, then? We can certainly empathize with how this change might be hurtful or disappointing, without taking responsibility for having caused that hurt or disappointment: “I know it stinks, honey. We both were really looking forward to our date. Tomorrow, one way or another, this presentation will be over. Why don't we go then?”

New scene. Your newborn brother has been wailing for more than an hour, while your frustrated mother has tried to sooth him and get him to sleep. Finally, he's drifted off and your mom has laid him in his crib. You're now helping your mom wash the pots and pans from dinner. She passes you a wet pan to dry, and it slips from your hands, clanging to the floor. A high-pitched shriek emanates from the baby's room, and your mother stares at the ceiling, exasperated. Do you apologize?

It's clear that the clanging pan woke the baby, and you were the last one to touch it. However, it was not a wrong. The fact that it happened to wake the baby does not somehow make it one. Accidents happen. But let's say that you were attempting to use the guidelines from this chapter and decided, "Well, I dropped it, so I'll take responsibility." Certainly, we can see how the "offense" negatively affected the baby and mom. It would seem a little weird to specifically name the offense ("I dropped the pan"), but I suppose we could do that, too. What about a plan of action for the next time? Will being more careful prevent wet items from slipping in the future? Were you truly not being careful? Or was it just "one of those things"? I think this is where the need for an apology gets ruled out here.

So, what could you say instead? Try, "Oh no! I feel awful! You worked so hard to get him to sleep. Do you want me to finish the dishes? Or would you rather have me try to get him back to sleep?"

One more scenario. Your friend Dave shared something with you in strict confidence. Later, your friend Shawn asks what's up with Dave, because he's noticed that Dave has been acting funny. You say to Shawn, "Dave told me what's up and asked me not to tell anyone. If I tell you, you have to *promise* me that you will keep it to yourself." Shawn promises, of course (who doesn't, when faced with the prospect of getting good dirt?), and you tell him.

The next day, Dave texts you: “Thx 4 keeping my personal life to urself loser.” You text him back — “???” — and receive Dave's reply: “figure it out.”

Do you apologize?

There is no question that you were in the wrong here. And it really doesn't matter how Dave found out. So going to Shawn and trying to track who said what to whom isn't the point. You were wrong. Broken trust is certainly hurtful to a relationship. You know exactly what you did and when. Can you sincerely commit to a change of action in the future? Can you ask Dave to forgive you? If so, then your apology may sound like this:

“Hey, Dave. I screwed up. You asked me to keep that information to myself . . . and I didn't. I told Shawn. That was wrong. Now I've embarrassed you and damaged your trust in me. I'm really sorry. I will understand if you don't want to confide in me again; but if you do, I will prove that I can keep my mouth shut. Will you forgive me?”

A few more thoughts on apologies.

Whenever possible, apologize in person, not through email, text or relaying a message through another person. Those are, for the most part, copouts. Have the character and decency to feel uncomfortable for a few minutes and deliver the apology face to face.

Apologies do not contain an “if.” It does not matter “if” the other person is sorry, too, even if you were both wrong. Being truly sorry means that you realize

what *you* did was wrong, regardless of whether anyone else was wrong or willing to admit the same.

In a different sense of “if,” many people tend to phrase apologies as, “I’m sorry *if* you were offended, but. . .” This is not an apology. It is actually nothing more than a clever rewording of “You should be sorry for being so sensitive; it’s a wonder that anyone can speak to you at all.” And that is how it is generally received. Remember that the first rule of thumb here is an acceptance of your *own* wrongdoing, not someone else’s actions or reactions to what you did. In cases where you truly do not feel you were wrong, but feel the urge to apologize, try something like this instead: “I see how hurt you are. Please believe that it was not my intention to hurt you. Had I known it would affect you this way, I would have done it differently. I didn’t know at the time, but I do now.”

Even when you do genuinely apologize, the other person may or may not express forgiveness for you at that time. They may never forgive you. They may or may not trust you again. An apology is not a means to an end, given in order to regain your relational standing or to get someone to stop being angry with you. It is a sincere realization and admission that you were wrong, that you hurt someone, and that you intend to change.

At the very least, carefully considering and redefining “I’m sorry” will cause your apologies to mean something again.

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APPENDIX

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

CHAPTER 28:

1. If you had to choose one or the other, would you say you are someone who tends to apologize too much, or too little?

2. Did/do you have good role models where apologies are concerned?

3. Why do you think it is so difficult for people to apologize when they know they are in the wrong? Why do you think it is so tempting for people to apologize when they don't mean it?

4. This book makes no claim to have figured everything out, or to be the end-all-be-all of truth and wisdom. Are there any parts of this chapter with which you disagree? Why?

5. Are there any specific thoughts from this chapter that you found to ring true and be a personal challenge where apologies are concerned?