

## Hard to say “I’m sorry...”

By Chris Nelson

Most of us hate being wrong. It chafes us, and leaves a rash. Over the years, we’ve all had many occasions to sample a flaky slice of humble pie and apologize to partners, customers, supervisors, co-workers, family members ... you name it. We have all had enough practice to get pretty good at it. (Not that we should brag about it however).

Our social interactions are ruled by “the three R’s”: Respect, Reputation, and Reciprocation. These categories can be readily applied throughout our workplace, between co-workers, both up and down the chain of command. It’s fairly easy to continue analyzing similar situations and see where the three R’s would be invoked. Keeping these in mind—and thus understanding the cause of hurt feelings and damaged trust—makes it easier for us to fix the situation, which is far more important.

1. **Apologize, and mean it.** If you *are* sorry, go to the trouble of describing what you’re sorry for, in such a way that you demonstrate you truly understand the offense.
2. **Fix it, if you can.** If you can’t fix it, compensate for it as best you can. Compensation can take many forms; in some situations, a sincere apology and admission of wrong doing will be enough. But it should be at least somewhat reciprocal. Overcompensating for an error can seem as false and half-hearted as under-compensating.
3. **Take steps to avoid a repetition.** If a reasonable person would have felt wronged, and there is action a reasonable person could take to avoid causing that offense in the future, take it. It’s pretty hard to go wrong by erring on the side of caution. Over time, this attitude builds a culture of prevention rather than correction, which encourages your team members to speak up the moment they see trouble coming and look for ways to avoid it. Not only does this make your teams more productive and boost morale, it will make your organization easier to work with and help you build a solid reputation for fair treatment of both your customers and staff alike.