

## FORGIVING LEADERSHIP

*“Love ... is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs ...” – I Corinthians 13*

Forgiveness lets you release the burden of judgment so you can keep moving forward. It allows you to reconcile with others and restore friendly relations.

You know that nurturing a grudge against someone is an unhealthy way to keep a relationship held hostage. As a servant leader, you maintain a healthy practice of making apologies for mistakes, accepting the apologies of others, and giving people a fresh start when appropriate.

Forgiveness does not mean that you overlook problems or poor performance. It means that you accept that everyone makes mistakes from time to time, and you can let go of the negative emotions that sometimes come from judging others' very human imperfections.

### Key Actions for Being Forgiving

- Offer a sincere apology when you make a mistake.

Follow the steps for offering an apology.

**1. Identify an opportunity.**

Be aware of how your actions affect others and the organization. Recognize when you have made a mistake or hurt someone in some way.

**2. Approach the person at an appropriate time and place.**

Apologies are more comfortable when they are private. Make sure the person has time to listen, and select a place where you will not be interrupted or overheard by others.

**3. Describe what you did and acknowledge how your actions had a negative impact on the other person, the team, and/or the organization.**

State exactly what you did in a straightforward way. Demonstrate that you understand the negative impact of your actions.

*EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:*

- “Yesterday, I lost my temper when we were discussing the schedule. My behavior was disrespectful to you.”
- “I’ve been showing up late to meetings, and have been distracted. This has been hampering everyone else’s ability to make decisions and keep the project moving.”

## Key Actions for Being Forgiving (continued)

- Offer a sincere apology when you make a mistake. (continued)

### **4. Make your apology and ask for forgiveness.**

An apology includes the key words “*I’m sorry*” or “*I apologize*.” Be sincere – your apology should be heartfelt.

*EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:*

- “*I am deeply sorry for losing my temper. I hope we can move past this.*”
- “*I apologize for being late and not being focused. Please forgive me.*”

### **5. Assert the importance of the relationship and state what you will do differently.**

State what you will do to change your behavior and/or ensure that the incident will not occur again.

*EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:*

- “*You are important to me and I will practice more patience and respect for your point of view in the future.*”
- “*I am glad that we can keep the project on track and not push back deadlines. This project is important to all of us. In the future, I will pay attention and be sure to show up on time.*”

### **6. Give the other person a chance to respond.**

Apologies are intended to make a difference and mend a wounded relationship. The person you offer your apologies to may be ready to accept, or they may not. If the other person is not in the right frame of mind to accept the apology at the time that you offer it, move on from that moment and give them time and space to process what you have said.

- Accept the apologies of others and let go of resentment.

#### **Follow the steps for accepting the apologies of others.**

##### **1. Recognize when someone wants to offer an apology.**

When someone approaches you to apologize for something, be sure you are in place to listen and take in what they have to say. If you are distracted by other priorities or not in a place where you feel you can accept the apology, you may want to ask the person to return at a later time when you can give him/her your full attention. Remember that apologies are more comfortable when they are private. Select a place where you will not be interrupted or overheard by others.

##### **2. Listen attentively to the person with an open mind and heart.**

When a person approaches you with an apology, assume that they are sincere and feel regret for their behavior or actions. Demonstrate that you are listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, and leaning forward.

## Key Actions for Being Forgiving (continued)

- Accept the apologies of others and let go of resentment.

### 3. Respond to the apology.

Acknowledge that you hear the person's remorse. If the person does not do so during the apology, describe the impact of the behavior or action on you, the team, and/or the organization. Also outline any necessary actions the person needs to take to move forward successfully.

*EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:*

- *"I hear you and understand why you feel bad. When you interrupt your teammates, they feel disrespected. In the future, be sure to listen and treat them with the respect they deserve."*
- *"I can see you are sorry. Because you were late, Kim had to stay longer to cover your shift. In the future, I expect you to show up on time, and when running late, call in and let us know."*

### 4. Accept the apology.

By accepting the apology, you allow the other person to put the event behind them and move on in a positive way. It is important for others to hear that you accept their offer of remorse.

*EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:*

- *"I accept your apology."*
- *"I can see your regret ... apology accepted."*

### 5. Be willing to release your hurt feelings, and move forward with a clean slate.

When others take ownership of their mistakes and show sincere regret, you have a responsibility as a servant leader to release them from their transgression. Holding onto to grudges and hurt feelings does not serve you, our guests, or the organization. Moving forward with a clean slate allows you and the other person to look to the future with a positive mindset.

- Provide second chances for others, when appropriate.

Some situations – such as serious violations of safety or harassment policies – don't allow for second chances. But in other situations, when an employee makes a serious mistake or displays irresponsible behavior, you will decide whether or not to give the person a second chance. Employees who take responsibility for the wrongdoing and clearly understand the negative impact of their actions are generally worth the effort. If you decide to give the person an opportunity to turn things around, help him/her learn from his/her mistakes by providing a structured path that focuses on new behaviors designed to improve performance.

#### **Describe the changes you will need to see as the person moves forward.**

Tell the person that you believe in his or her ability to change. Then be clear and specific about the new behaviors you will need to see. To get better buy-in, ask the person to participate in identifying how he or she needs to change.

## Key Actions for Being Forgiving (continued)

- **Provide second chances for others, when appropriate.**

### **Outline your expectations and plans for change.**

Provide a structured plan that ensures expectations are realistic and achievable within an appropriate time frame.

- State exactly what you want the person to do differently and how progress will be measured.
- Set a reasonable time period for improvement, indicating when new behaviors are to be achieved.
- Break objectives into smaller steps so that the person can make progress and achieve milestones.
- Conduct regularly-scheduled check-ins to discuss progress as well as issues or obstacles the person is experiencing.
- Document all discussions so that you have a record of the steps you took to help the person improve.

### **Give the person a fresh start, with no marks against them.**

Realize that the person may have a few setbacks as they practice and learn new behaviors. Reinforce and celebrate improvements as the person moves forward, and don't hold slip-ups against them. When it is clear that behavior and performance have improved to the required level, congratulate the employee.