

Forgiveness

Very few people know how to apologize, while fewer still know how to accept an apology. Since we are human and make mistakes, an important skill to know is how to apologize. Four rules are recommended:

1. Do it as soon as possible. The longer you wait the harder it is because the more you can imagine ways your apology might be turned against you.
2. Be specific about the behavior you are apologizing for, not like a Washington politician: "If I did anything wrong ..." Rather "When you ...when I ...I did not think ... etc." Take time describing the specific behavior.
3. Tell your feelings about the event and your feelings now. "I am embarrassed to think about how thoughtless that was ..."
4. Tell how that is not like your usual or typical behavior, so you end by affirming yourself. Secondly, when accepting an apology: Do not say: I am glad you finally see your mistake, or it's about time, or I am still hurting ... and other shoot-from-the-hip statements that aggravate the tension. So, if you can honestly do so, either simply "OK, let's get on with our work (life, relationship, whatever)," or better, "I am sorry for my part also."

A good definition of forgiveness, by psychologist Robert Enright is: "Giving up the resentment to which you are entitled, and offering to the persons who hurt you friendlier attitudes to which they are not entitled."

Those who refuse to forgive carry the 'ghost' of the hurtful person and give away their own power to this memory. Without doubt, those with whom one chooses to remain angry will continue to control one, even when and particularly when one denies this is so. Those who have not resolved conflicts with family members will carry that garbage into their current relationships even though they may be blind to the fact. I have seen it repeatedly. Whatever is repressed is bound to be repeated. Resentment limits one's emotional, physical and spiritual development.