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life advice

Take Back Your Power, Don't Apologize!

It's time to stop apologizing for things you can't control and start finding solutions to what you can.

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March 2013



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If you didn't contribute to the problem, don't apologize.

Self-blame and guilt make terrible bedfellows, yet there are insidious ways we let these varmints into our marriages, to our own detriment. For instance, have you ever been involved in the following scenario?

Your spouse texts, "Terrible day. Traffic horrible. Boss worse."

You respond, "So sorry!"

Your beloved continues the litany when he or she gets home, "Nothing seems to go right, I don't know what to do."

You repeat, "I'm so sorry," and your spouse goes on and on. And on! You feel bad, powerless and blame yourself, feeling you should do something to alleviate the bad feelings, but what? Guilt promptly sets in.

Later that evening, your spouse sighs, "I have such a headache."

You reply, "I'm sorry, honey," and here you go again, feeling hopeless and powerless and as if somehow it's your fault, that you should be able to fix it, you're a lousy excuse for a spouse if

you don't. More guilt ensues.

But here's the million-dollar-question: What are you apologizing for? Did you contribute to or cause the rotten traffic/horrible boss/awful headache? Be honest with yourself. If you did contribute to a problem, then by all means, apologize. If you didn't, then don't. Take back your power! Don't apologize for something you didn't do. Instead, express your feelings and offer help in a way that is appropriate and feels good to you.

For example, when your beloved starts in with, "I had a terrible day," respond with an expression of your feelings, something along the lines of, "Gee, that sounds awful," and then ask specifically if there is something you can do.

Now, you are powerful! You are helping your mate work towards a solution, rather than offering your no doubt heartfelt but ineffective, "I'm sorry."

Let's take the situation one step further. What do you do if an answer to your offer of help, your spouse sighs and says, "No, I guess it'll be all right." Then, let it go. Don't force your help on your spouse when all he or she really wanted was a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. We all need some tea-and-sympathy from time to time.

But what do you do if the response is "Yes" to your offer of help, and you are then given specific ways in which you can help? You now have a choice. You can choose to help your spouse in the way that was requested, or you can choose not to. Again, without saying, "I'm sorry."

For instance, your mate says, "I have a pounding headache."

You reply, "Gee, that sounds awful, is there anything I can do to help?" Your spouse replies, "Yes, actually, would you drive down to the pharmacy for me and pick up some medicine? And maybe swing by the dry cleaners while you're at it?"

If you want to do that, fine, no problem. If you don't want to do it, however, having made an offer of help does not obligate you to help in a way that interferes with whatever you had planned. Be creative! Think of a way to respond to your mate's request that accommodates both your desires.

For example, you are in the middle of a project and it's highly inconvenient for you to just drop it and run off to the pharmacy. A creative solution might be, "Well, I can't do that for you, but I know the pharmacy will deliver, and I could pick up your cleaning tomorrow after work."

As long as you stay in a problem-solving mode, you'll be effective and helpful. Yes, there are times when apologies are in order, but when they're not, don't apologize!

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