

How to Make an Apology

What Happens Next - 05.13.23

Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein. What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, finance, and culture.

Our first guest is Edwin Battistella who is the author of the book Sorry about That: The Language of Public Apology.

I am fascinated by apologies and what makes a good one and why some fall flat. It is more than just words as it must include true contrition. We all screw up, so let's find out how to make more effective mea culpas.

We also welcome back my buddy Darren Schwartz who is the What Happens Next movie critic. Darren is going to weigh in on the success and failures of apologies, and he will also review the 9-time Oscar nominated movie Banshees of Inisherin because apology and forgiveness is at the core of the film.

Edwin, can you please begin your six-minute opening remarks.

Edwin Battistella:

I'm Edwin Battistella. I'm an emeritus professor of English and Linguistics at Southern Oregon University, and I'm the author of, Sorry About That, the Language of Public Apology published in 2014. As a linguist, I've always been interested in how people do things with words, how we use them to repair relationships, how we use them to harm others, how we use them to make promises, threats, all sorts of things. A few years ago, I got interested in the language of public apology during Barack Obama's State of the Union address, when a Congressman from South Carolina jumped up and shouted, "you lie." Then the next day he apologized. A couple days after that, he retracted his apology. I remember thinking, somebody should really investigate the way public apologies work. Sorry About That was the result.

I looked at about 500 different public apologies over the course of many years. One of the things that was very informative to me was the work of a sociologist named Erving Goffman, who published a book in 1956 called The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life. What Goffman talked about was the notion of face in the sense we want to create a coherent, positive impression of ourselves with others in society.

When you do something awful, or even just something run of the mill bad, one of the ways you can repair your standing in society is to condemn your earlier self and then ask forgiveness. This idea that you are no longer the self that did the harm is a fundamental notion of apology.

An apology is both a social act where you're bringing that new self-back into good standing in society and a moral act where you're accepting the shame and the blame for what you've done. I looked at apologies that really went wrong. One of the ways that they tend to go wrong is insincerity. With the actual language itself the words that people use, I found the passive voice, the famous mistakes were made type of apology.

Conditionals, "I apologize if anyone is offended." Indefinite phrasings like, "I apologize for whatever it is I did." Hair splitting where you might apologize for one part of an offense, and then ignore the others. "I'm sorry for my choice of words," when really it was something else you did that was much more egregious.

So, the choice of the word makes a difference in terms of how the apology is taken.

Larry Bernstein:

You referenced Erving Goffman in your opening remarks, and I want to give our listeners a little background. Goffman is one of the most important social scientists of the 20th century. He was an incredibly observant sociologist. His breakout book was *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, and it came out of his field work in the Shetland Islands off the coast of Britain where he noticed that the villagers had various faces with the public depending on the other person or the circumstances. You present yourself differently at home, in the village or with a stranger from a foreign country. And then Goffman applied this framework to the world of apologies in his classic work *Relations in Public*. Goffman concludes that we have both a good self and a bad one and that in the apology we need to tell the harmed party that we are aware of the bad self and want to be the better self and will work towards that end. Tell us about Goffman's work and apologies.

Edwin Battistella:

It's a natural response when we do something egregious to want to split into a self that isn't responsible. And you see this all the time in apologies where someone will say, well, I take responsibility for that even though it wasn't my fault. People try to evade blame, and some sociologists will talk about this as giving an account rather than an apology. For something to be a sincere apology, it needs to be "I was the one at fault. And now I'm ready to condemn that earlier self and make up for it in the future."

Larry Bernstein:

Let's use a different example from your book. Mel Gibson is arrested, and he tells the police officers who he assumes are Jewish and he makes several anti-Semitic remarks. Later he makes

an apology. He says, "that's not who I am. That's the inebriated Mel Gibson." What do you make of presenting the different selves as one being drunk and the other sober?

Edwin Battistella:

Yeah, this is often the way one creates an account like this. "I was drunk I wasn't paying attention. I was angry." The Mel Gibson situation was interesting because he apologized the next day to the police for being drunk and disorderly, but he never apologized to the Jewish community that first time. It took a couple of weeks and a certain amount of public pressure from the Anti-Defamation League for him to come around to a second apology.

I think people are often more revealing of their actual self when they're less inhibited. and when their guard is up when they're performing in public, then they, they put on that public-face.

Larry Bernstein:

Mel Gibson makes anti-Semitic remarks and then in his second apology says he is sorry to the Jews. I am Jewish but who represents the Jews in this matter. It is interesting that the Anti-Defamation League's President publicly announced that he was rejecting Mel Gibson's apology and asked that he try again. Who should represent the public in these matters?

Edwin Battistella:

The ADL have a certain standing as a group representing Jews and with a particular history of activism and alertness. So that gives them an opportunity to speak in an authoritative voice. They may not speak for everyone but they're able to offer a response to Mel Gibson's bad apology. Who is it that has the authority to either accept or reject an apology? And this is why national apologies are so tricky sometimes, because with many communities, there's not one organization that is the spokesperson for everyone.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's break down what goes into a good apology. Step one is to first apologize to the person that's been harmed and that is what we just discussed. The second is to identify exactly what you did wrong, because with many failed apologies what is left unsaid is the relevant bad behavior that we're talking about. Can you please comment on the proper identification of the misconduct?

Edwin Battistella:

The most important thing in an apology is to name what you've done wrong. Often that involves identifying the rule of conduct that you violated, and identifying who you did it to by addressing it directly to them. If I just say "my bad," or "I'm sorry," that leaves everything hanging. An apology really needs to identify what the harm was. That opens the door to talking about how you're going to be a different person in the future.

Larry Bernstein:

Why do you think people fail to identify the specific wrongdoing?

Edwin Battistella:

It's hard to take the shame and the blame for what you've done. It's much easier just to say something like "mistakes were made" than to get up and say, I apologize to you for behaving inappropriately or for using this slur or for damaging your car. It's easier to distance yourself from the harm.

Larry Bernstein:

The third most important ingredient in a successful apology is to be sincere in your contrition.

Edwin Battistella:

Contriteness is interesting. To accept the shame of something is that piece of sincerity that someone's not just reading an apology that their public relations team put together for them. You get a feeling that they really do feel ashamed about what they've done. One of the ways you can tell is whether they walk the walk after the apology. It's easier to find these bad insincere apologies where people try and get out of trouble. But there do seem to be somewhere a person really changes their behavior and is different for the long term afterwards.

Larry Bernstein:

That last stage of an apology appears to be, I promise to be better going forward, specifically with the injured party. I promise not to harm you anymore. Talk to me about the promise to be a better person.

Edwin Battistella:

There was a situation a few years ago where there was a football team that was singing racist chants on a bus, and it was recorded. Two of the students who were singing apologized. They made a good apology. They met with some African American leaders in their community, they had the leaders with them when they apologized. One of the students said that he was going to dedicate himself to fighting racism or anti-racist education. He really put down a marker for what his behavior was going to be in the future.

You could tell that if he followed through, he would be a changed individual. The fact of doing something bad and apologizing for it and coming to terms with it was a life-changing thing for him.

Larry Bernstein:

What makes a bad apology.

Edwin Battistella:

There are so many bad ones that it creates a situation where nobody believes in apology anymore. People are just assuming they're insincere. You can tell if someone does something wrong and they use language like, "I regret that this situation happened." Often there's a sense that they are apologizing to the public for something.

They should be apologizing to an individual. I've noticed this with YouTube apologies in particular, which were very popular for a time because you just record the apology and put it out there and you don't actually have to face a person.

Larry Bernstein:

Have you improved your own apologizing?

Edwin Battistella:

One of the things that I learned from doing all this research was I tend to apologize less but apologize better. If I don't think I've done something wrong, then I won't apologize. But if I think I've done something wrong, I'll be sincerely contrite and try to follow those steps.

Larry Bernstein:

The other day, I was supposed to meet my friend for a drink, and I screwed up. I forgot and my wife invited me to go somewhere else. He called and said where are you? I told him I screwed up, and then I mentioned how I got disoriented and confused. Should I have made any excuses or ended it with just screwing up?

Edwin Battistella:

I would've not explained the confusion I've done the steps that you did. I'm sincerely sorry. I want to make it up to you. When can we get together? I got overcommitted. Without bringing your wife into it or that you got discombobulated. The fewer people you bring into an apology the better. Because there's always that sense of, he is trying to blame his wife.

Larry Bernstein:

Yeah. I didn't mean to do that <laugh>.

Don't people want to know what happened? Why did you screw up? What happened?

Edwin Battistella:

The immediate thing would be to take the responsibility, say that you're going to make it right. And then, later when things are in the sort of cool hindsight, you can explain.

Larry Bernstein:

The apology has been made and now the other party must decide whether to accept it and forgive. How should that decision be made?

Edwin Battistella:

The role of the person who's on the receiving end of an apology is to listen and give it some consideration and feedback. An apology is the start of a different conversation. You're having the beginning of a conversation with what could be a new person. Sometimes the person is not ready to receive an apology. Or they can't agree on what the harm was. And that's often the case with national apologies.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you have a duty or a responsibility to forgive a sincere apology? For example, from a religious perspective at Yom Kippur the service starts out by saying I've sinned, and it gives you a laundry list. And I look through the laundry list and I go, oh my God, I think I batted a hundred this year, and there's always a guy next to me who goes, Larry, look, you're particularly bad on this one for supporting bad causes. But in the second part, it says that we should forgive those who have sinned and try to move on. But not everyone's very good about that. Tell me about forgiving.

Edwin Battistella:

One is you must judge the sincerity of the other person. Just as you can apologize too quickly and apologize for the wrong thing, you can also forgive too quickly just to make something go away. I think that the social or moral responsibility of the person receiving an apology is to see where that conversation needs to go.

Larry Bernstein:

I had a podcast with Tina Brown to discuss her book, *The Palace Papers*, and Prince Harry's book *Spare*. In it, Harry speaks ill of his brother William. He says that William beat him up and wasn't there to console him in his moments of grief, wasn't loving, and was not supportive of his relationship with his wife. I asked Tina, do you think that relationship could ever be repaired? And she said it would take a Christ-like disposition to be able to move past that. How do you think about forgiveness based upon the level of the transgression and the intimacy and public nature of the dispute?

Edwin Battistella:

My guess is there would need to be some sort of family or royal tragedy for the two brothers to have a rapprochement. Maybe when Charles dies, they may get to the point of having a sincere conversation. I suspect they'll just avoid each other for quite a long time. And then as they age, there'll be some sense of, we really shouldn't have let this get this far kind of situation.

I see that with people who hold a grudge for a long time. I grew up in New Jersey with all these old Italian families and they believed in the vendetta. So, you'd have these, these brothers who wouldn't talk to each other for years until the mother dies or something, and they have this cure for reunion.

Larry Bernstein

We often see public apologies for actions done by other people in the distant past. Who should be making these apologies and are they appropriate?

Edwin Battistella:

It's important to look at the effect of the apology. Does it create a more functional society, a more functional polity? Do the people that are being apologized to feel that their historical experience is somehow being validated and recognized rather than being dismissed.

Larry Bernstein:

I think apologies and forgiveness need to go together. People should give sincere apologies with an expectation that they will be forgiven by the other side. But let's suppose that we think that it is highly likely that the other side will not accept the apology and that there will be no forgiveness. Now the apologizer will have denigrated and brought shame on himself for little gain.

I'll give you an example from your book where you highlight that Richard Nixon refused to apologize for Watergate because Nixon believed that his political enemies would never forgive him. So, what's the point? Nixon argued that he had already made the ultimate apology. He resigned his office, he ended his political career, he paid the ultimate penalty. What's the point of giving an apology where there is no expectation of forgiveness?

Edwin Battistella:

I think what Nixon said at one point was "they won't see me grovel" or something like that. He was clearly someone who felt that an apology wouldn't get him any forgiveness. Maybe because he didn't know who exactly would forgive him. I think that in a situation like that where someone feels that there's no relationship there to repair, he saw no point in apologizing.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is Bill Clinton's apology in the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Edwin Battistella:

It took him, if I remember correctly, five different tries to get to a reasonable apology that he made at a Yom Kipper Prayer breakfast. The first apology was "I take full responsibility for having inappropriate relations." Even his supporters thought that that was a horrible apology.

Over the course of the next few months, he apologized two or three different times, and finally got to a point where he talked about shame.

It was on September 11th, 1998, "I don't think there's any fancy way to say that I've sinned. I believe that to be forgiven, more than sorrow is required. At least two more things: First, genuine repentance, a determination to change and to repair breaches of my own making. I have repented. Second, what my Bible calls a broken spirit. An understanding that I must have God's help to be the person that I want to be. A willingness to give the very forgiveness I seek. A renunciation of the pride and the anger, which cloud judgment, lead people to excuse and compare and to blame and complain."

Larry Bernstein:

What's he talking about?

Edwin Battistella:

One of the ways to read this is genuine repentance repairing a broken spirit. He's talking about using his religious beliefs to become that better person, to become a new person. So, he's really echoing the split-self idea here. In the earlier apologies he was the typical lawyerly Bill Clinton that would say, "I regret what happened," but there wasn't much to it. He went from being lawyerly to being preacherly here.

Larry Bernstein:

Going back to your rules for a good apology. The first is to identify what you did wrong, which in this case was to have a sexual and inappropriate relationship with an intern in the oval office and then lying about it.

Edwin Battistella:

He does an interesting thing here when he says, "I don't think there's a fancy way to say that I've sinned." This is the part where if he were being sort of fully contrite, he would name the harm that he did to Monica Lewinsky, to his family, et cetera. But he tries to get around it by saying, there's no fancy way to name what I did.

Larry Bernstein:

What does he mean by that?

Edwin Battistella:

He accepts blame, but not quite being specific about what was done wrong. As he went forward, he apologized more a few months later. "What I want the American people to know is that I'm profoundly sorry for all I've done wrong in words and deeds. I never should have misled the country, Congress, my friends, or my family. Quite simply, I gave into my shame." So, as he

goes on, he takes different pieces of the apology and builds them out. But as people have pointed out he's never really apologized to Monica Lewinsky for all this.

Larry Bernstein:

Clinton loved to use polling before he made a political decision. I assume he tested the various apologies to see what worked the best. In the future, we can ask Chat GPT to write an appropriate apology.

Edwin Battistella:

This would be interesting to put in a scenario and then ask Chat GPT to write five apologies for it, <laugh>. Before there was Chat GPT, there were consultants who would look at what's been written on apologies and try to craft something that hit all the buttons. But they still must be delivered by people. I've seen a couple of apologies that were clearly written by consultants or PR experts and when the actual person goes out to deliver the apology, it comes out of their mouth in a much different way. It'll be interesting to see how much you can fake sincerity. Like the old saying, if you can fake sincerity, you can fake anything.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode with a note of optimism. Ed, what are you optimistic about with regard to apologies?

Edwin Battistella:

There's been a lot of talk about apologies in the last 40 years, and I think people are thinking much more critically about what makes a good apology and what doesn't. There are still lots of missteps and lots of insincerity out there, but I'm encouraged by the way that people are thinking about these distinctions between apologizing, regretting, empathy and thinking about how to name harm.

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Larry Bernstein:

Darren, what makes a good apology?

Darren Schwartz:

I think what makes a good apology is that there's authenticity and that you specifically state what you had done wrong referencing how you think it may have made the other person feel. And then state that you're not going to do it anymore, whatever that thing is. Those are the main components for me.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you think you should ask for forgiveness or not?

Darren Schwartz:

I always want forgiveness. I prefer to ask for forgiveness or get it without even apologizing. And I think that's probably not the right way to go. Asking for forgiveness, maybe it's a little bit too self-centered. That said, I always do.

Larry Bernstein:

I don't think I do. I am surprised you would bother.

Darren Schwartz:

Well, I've literally never heard you apologize once in your life.

Larry Bernstein:

Are you effective with your apologies?

Darren Schwartz:

I think that I've become much better.

Larry Bernstein:

I don't.

Darren Schwartz:

Well, I'm sorry for that Larry. I wish you felt differently, but you're wrong. I've gotten better.

Larry Bernstein:

I'm not sorry about that.

Darren Schwartz:

Well, I'm sorry that you're not sorry. I think I'm better now. I don't know. Who knows?

Larry Bernstein:

How have you improved?

Darren Schwartz:

I think I do less things wrong. My family literally used to call me, "I'm sorry and oops," jokingly, because I would always fall on the stairs. I'd say, oops. And then I'd always say, I'm so sorry because I was just constantly doing things wrong. I think I do less things wrong now. And I think because of that, I'm more concerned about if my apology is received well.

Larry:

Do you think people overuse the word sorry?

Darren Schwartz:

I do. I think that's part of the vernacular that we've just developed over time. It's constantly saying, instead of, excuse me, people say, sorry. So, you're in line and you jostled someone and instead of you saying, excuse me, and now people say, I'm so sorry. And what's interesting is that there's another weird thing that happens in our language where now people say, you are good. Like, nobody ever said you're good before. So I'm sorry, and you are good. I think that we overuse it.

Larry Bernstein:

My bad.

Darren Schwartz:

Same thing that's new too. I mean, within the last 10, 20 years, I don't agree with that either. I'm sorry, I have a question. Well, why are you sorry, just excuse me. I have a question. But if you constantly are using that, it undermines in the future when you are sorry. And I think you're a schmuck. This guy's always apologizing.

Larry Bernstein:

Well, this expression, sorry, often is just an expression of empathy. "I'm sorry you feel that way."

Darren Schwartz:

I am too.

Larry Bernstein:

What is that? I'm sorry you feel that way.

Darren Schwartz:

I'm sorry you feel that way. It's a bit of a power play. When someone says, "Hey man, I don't like, you ran over my cat and I'm mad" "you say, "I'm sorry you feel that way."

Larry Bernstein:

Yeah.

Darren Schwartz:

Now what do you mean you're sorry you killed by cat man. What's the story here? I think that that probably is a little bit of a verbal bullying that people who just do not want to apologize.

Larry Bernstein:

People use apologies with empty expressions. I take responsibility for that and then proceed to explain why they had no control over that situation and don't deserve any culpability. Tell me about taking responsibility.

Darren Schwartz:

Taking responsibility is critical in life. And I think it shows people that you're engaged and you're honest and you're sincere. But I also think it's hard for people these days, and I think we are in an environment in our country or in our world when someone says, "Hey, I don't like the fact you did this." Then you attack the person that says that, as opposed to going down the path of trying to reconcile and discuss it. People push back on having any responsibility, any accountability. And I think accountability and responsibility, to a certain extent, make the world go around and you figure it out and you come together, and you move forward.

Larry Bernstein:

Darren, as the TV, movie, and cultural critic for What Happens Next, I'd like you to discuss a movie that you recommended to me entitled The Banshees of Inisherin. The film was released in October 2022. It was nominated for nine Oscars. It won none. Some people loved it, others thought it was a complete bore or worse that it made them angry.

I found it very thought provoking because it deals with questions about apologies and forgiveness. Darren, please take us through the plot and how this film helps us better understand apologies.

Darren Schwartz:

I did love it. The plot centers around two very good friends on an Irish island. Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleason are the two protagonists and they're best friends. At 2 pm, every day meet at the local pub, and they drink. One day it opens up with Brandon Gleason not being there. Colin Farrell says, "where is he?" Goes to his house, says, "Hey, are you coming?" And he just ignores him. He knocks on the window, won't even look at him, won't talk to him, goes back in the bar. They're like, "Hey, where's your buddy? Are you guys rowing?" Brendan Gleason's character says, eventually, "I don't want to be around you."

Colin Farrell is continually apologizing. He doesn't even really know what he's apologizing for. There's no specific reason given. So, in this case, there has been no malfeasance. There's been no crossing the lines, there's nothing presumably done except for Colin Farrell's existence, which after years and years of being best friends. Now Brendan Gleason says, "I'm done with that. I'm fed up." And the rest of the movie is Colin Farrell trying to come to terms with that. And you can

see it literally drives him crazy because he can't get a straight answer. And he apologizes umpteen times to no effect.

Larry Bernstein:

One of Colin Farrell's apologies is if he said something when he was drunk that angered his former friend, please forgive him. And that is one of the themes of this podcast is referring to your bad self and making the argument that that is not who I am.

Darren Schwartz:

What's interesting is that Brennan Gleason's reply is, "I prefer you when you're drunk," <laugh>. I think the blanket apology when all else fail is probably fine. If you then can follow up and say, "just tell me what I did and I won't do it again. I'm sorry. I have no recollection if you tell me that I won't do it again." I think it's fine. I think if you don't really go in depth and the specifics of why someone's mad at you or what you did wrong, I think that it's probably a cop out.

Larry Bernstein:

In the movie, things get crazy and at one point, Brennan Gleason says "enough is enough, let's call off further violence and malfeasance." But Colin refuses to accept the truce. Should you forgive?

Darren Schwartz:

There are things that you cannot forgive people for. You must have a line. And when people cross a line, then you don't need an apology. You just don't have to have them in your life. What's interesting is that's what is happening between these two characters, except that Colin Farrell hadn't really done anything except be annoying to Brennan Gleason.

Larry Bernstein:

I want to focus on the part after apology and forgiveness and then moving on. After the apology and its acceptance with forgiveness, the next issue is whether we continue the relationship as it was or in a new way, or do we go our separate ways. On this tiny island where there is one pub and a handful of residents, the whole point is that you cannot go your separate way. Now what.

Darren Schwartz:

Well, I think that this thing ends badly. There needs to be maybe a part two, which is where these guys just kill each other. There's only so many sheep you can hang out with on this island, and there's only so many places you can walk. Listen, they did some bad things. If you haven't watched a movie, watch it. It's a dark comedy and extremely disturbing. You either have to accept the apology, you have to kill one of them or they're both gonna die because there's just too much tsuris, if you know Yiddish too much tsuris going on.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's now move to our favorite Hollywood movie star Mel Gibson. Take us through Mel Gibson's failed apology.

Darren Schwartz:

The incident that people know about was the anti-Semitic rant that was captured on the police officer's audio when he was stopped and was hammered. He went through multiple different iterations of apologizing until he had enough people sit him down and say, "here's how you should do it, man." And then he figured it out and people kind of accepted it.

What I think probably less people know, is that in 2010, he was recorded by his girlfriend Oksana Greg and the things he said on that would make the worst of humanity blush, it was racist, sexist, homophobic, cruel. It was horrible. He was also charged with battery and hitting her. You look back at how that completely undermines his apology. Does that mean now that I can't watch, you know, Road Warrior or Mad Max? You know, can I not watch Braveheart? I don't know. What do you think?

Larry Bernstein:

No, I mean, it's great art. Twitter, I think we, we should be able to distinguish it. I mean Roald Dahl was also an anti-Semite, and I mean, I'm going to read the Twits to, the grandkids. I mean, it's the best.

Darren Schwartz:

Yeah, I didn't know that. I'll be honest with you, it's actually kind of upsetting. I mean, James, the Giant Peach fantastic. Mr. Fox. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. By the way. No, very few people know about Charlie and the Glass Elevator, you know, also his four grandparents, they were all in bed. You know, they get outta bed. Four people. Yeah. Just facing each other. I mean, there's so many different, you know, hygiene issues and, you know, terrifying.

Larry Bernstein:

There's a famous apology that Biden made to Obama during Obama's presidential race. He said something like "I think this is a different kind of candidate. He's an articulate and clean black man." What do you make of that and Obama's decision to accept Biden's apology?

Darren Schwartz:

I think what most people would not be shocked about regardless of your political affiliation is that Joe Biden made a gaffe <laugh>. This goes back decades. Even the hair plugs, I mean, from the eighties, I think he said on the Anita Hill congressional hearings that was a plastic surgery gaffe. But everyone needs each other. They're all on the same team. I think Obama certainly is a

high character guy. Also, very savvy. We're going to make the best of this and move on. Ultimately Biden gave a very good apology.

Larry Bernstein:

Some people, politicians included, don't apologize.

Darren Schwartz:

Right.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you feel about that? Do you think it's a strength or a weakness?

Darren Schwartz:

I think it depends on the situation. We have some examples right now where former President Trump does not apologize. I don't think he's ever apologized. The people around him love it. I think it emboldens people. I think it makes you less of a human being, but maybe you don't have to be human.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's talk about Bill Clinton's apologies.

Darren Schwartz:

I think that he's a savvy guy. I don't think he meant a word of it. I think it took him a long time to get an apology that made sense. I watched it and it's on YouTube, one of the funniest parts about it is that when he finally gave the apology that people said was the right one, and I think it was delivered at a Yom Kippur breakfast.

Larry Bernstein:

How can that be? Yom Kippur is when you fast.

Darren Schwartz:

He probably gobbled a cheeseburger or six. The best part of it's now a third or fourth try at apologizing. He said something like, "I've been on quite a journey the last few weeks for us to get to the rock bottom truth." And it's like he was an archeologist with the entire team. Like they're digging for the truth. But he had the truth the whole time. It was kind of brilliant.

The other thing is that he did it, like I said, on Yom Kippur. And, I've always had a personal philosophy. I save all the things really bad things that I'm going to do just before Yom Kippur because for those you don't know Yom Kippur is a Day of Atonement, you go in, you say, I'm

sorry, boom, you're forgiven. So if you really load those up August, September, October, done. If you do something wrong in November, that's really bad and you're a Jew, you're an idiot.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you have suggestions to improve forgiveness?

Darren Schwartz:

I don't think you have to let it go. Maybe just retaliate, you retaliate enough, then you feel as bad as they do. And then you're even, I guess that's one way probably, not advisable.

Larry Bernstein:

Jimmy Swaggart. Take me through what happened, the apologies and its effectiveness.

Darren Schwartz:

The Jimmy Swaggart incident, I remember from the eighties. He was caught with the prostitute. The Council of Religious Leaders said, "you're suspended for two years." He went on TV, and he cried like a baby. But he didn't really apologize. What he did was, what Clinton kind of did, the God-based apology. "I'm so sorry. I now realize I have to answer to God or to a higher power." He didn't really say the specific things that had happened. I think that's also kind of brilliant, you say, "listen, God's running this deal now. God's the judge. You people don't really need a judgment. He and I are working this out."

People buy into that, which I think is ridiculous. Suspended for two years, came back for three months. And that's what everyone really remembers. The Jimmy Swaggart crying incident. But what a lot of people don't realize is that in 1991, he was driving the wrong way down a street which seems bad. He was pulled over by a cop. And in the car with him was a different prostitute. This time he announced to the world, I think his son announced or someone announced that he had consulted with God and God told him to relay the following message, it's none of your damn business. <laugh> it was brilliant. So, then he stepped down for a period, which I assume was for, you know, more coke and hookers. The second night. He's like, forget it. I talked to God. We're good. Leave me alone.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you think about hypocrisy and the public and his congregant's willingness to forgive him for this transgression?

Darren Schwartz:

Well, I don't think the congregants are public. It's their hypocrisy. I think the hypocrisy to me in that is the amount that people are willing to be deceived in the name of God. And that's not a controversial statement in terms of believing in God or not. It's just that once you do that God

based apology, people just seem to buy into it. And so I think that's the real hypocrisy. I think that people just allow themselves to get fooled because they have such a deep belief in their religion, which makes it even more so how much Jimmy Swaggart and others like him have betrayed them by saying, "Hey, God's forgiven me, so you should too."

Larry Bernstein:

Let's talk about successful apologies: Hugh Grant.

Darren Schwartz:

He was just getting his career started. He just started in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, which was like his first big hit.

Larry Bernstein:

He's dating Elizabeth Hurley.

Darren Schwartz:

Hottest woman in the world as far as I'm concerned at the time. And he got caught on Sunset Boulevard with a prostitute. His apology has been referred to as the most successful apology in the world. The first thing that happened is they took his mugshot. And look at his mugshot, he looks upset, he looks sad, he's got the floppy hair, his hair looks sad, but it's magnificent. So then, they went kind of on a PR tour. But the big part of that was he was on *The Tonight Show* and Jay Leno, looks at him, he goes, "what the hell were you thinking?"

Everyone laughed. He looked sheepish. And then what was brilliant is he said, "I've been consulted by a lot of people. They've come forward, they've given me advice to do this or do that." And essentially, he's saying, people were giving me advice on how to make excuses and deflect blame. However, I think he said, "I know that that's bollocks. That's bullshit and I've chosen not to do that, and I need to take full responsibility and for everyone I've hurt." And then he went and apologized.

And what to me was so brilliant about that is he now is saying that we all know that people just in general, certainly in this business, were going to tell him me to try to get out of it. I said, "no, you guys are the bad ones. I'm going to take the hit and be honest." And he was forgiven. He still beloved, phenomenal hair, good looking guy. I don't know how old he is now? He looks fantastic.

Larry Bernstein:

Give us an apology from your family.

Darren Schwartz:

At a very young age, my father, Morry Schwartz, was asked by our neighbors the Dalbergs, I hope they're not listening by the way, to watch their goldfish. They had three and they had a typical goldfish fishbowl. You had to change the water because it's dirty. I was in our utility room with him. I was excited.

I had a general idea of how to do it, but I didn't know this seemed like a high-level operation. My father takes the bowl and is over the big utility sink and the fish is still in it. And he's now trying to navigate the water out while keeping the fish in. He's trying to maximize efficiency. He's going to dump the water out, fish stay in, fill it up, and he gets almost to the end, and he had to do that one more tilt and one at a time. Bang, Bang, Bang down the sink <laugh>. I watched it in a horror. I started shrieking. I tried to get my fingers in there, just gone. After I was hysterical, I said, "what are we going to do? We're going to call a plumber." He said, "Nope, we're going to go to the pet store." And so, we went to the pet store, and we got three goldfish that looked like the other goldfish. And we gave 'em back and no one was the wiser. So, If any of the Dalberg family is listening, I'd like to apologize. It was not my fault, which is the cornerstone of a bad apology.

Larry Bernstein:

This is a deflection.

Darren Schwartz:

It is not my fault. It's my father's fault. And he died and maybe he died early, because of this.

Larry Bernstein:

My niece Caroline went on a vacation and gave her goldfish to my parents, her grandparents, to take care of them. In a similar situation, I think they cleaned the bowl, and they woke up in the morning and the fish were upside down, so they went to the pet store. They got new fish and then they handed it over. In the handoff, Caroline said, "that's not my goldfish. You killed it." I mean, how horrible was that?

Darren Schwartz:

Well, what was the reply?

Larry Bernstein:

You're a smart little girl.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode with a note of optimism. Darren, what are you optimistic about as it relates to apologies and forgiveness?

Darren Schwartz:

I don't know.

Larry Bernstein:

Are you pessimistic?

Darren Schwartz:

No, I grew up as an optimist and I think you grow out of that and then maybe try to recapture it. I don't know. I'm feeling pretty good.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you have anything related to this apology episode?

Darren Schwartz:

Okay. Let's do optimism. Okay. Okay. Fine. A note of optimism. I'll say this in lieu of having anything like high minded, I'll be totally honest with you. I got new irons this year. Okay. I got Ping 525s. I am hitting them fantastic. And I feel pretty good.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Edwin and Darren for joining us today.

If you missed last week's show, check it out. The topic was India is Broken. Our speaker was Ashoka Mody who is a Professor in International Economic Policy at Princeton. He is the author of the book India is Broken: A People Betrayed, Independence to Today.

Ashoka discussed the problems inherent in India's democracy with its insidious corruption. We discussed India's failures in public health and education from kindergarten through college and how that fueled India's economic underperformance relative to China and its other Eastern Asian neighbors.

India is the world's most populated country at 1.4 billion people and that is more than 17% of the world's population. So, India is everybody's problem.

You can find our previous episodes and transcripts on our website whathappensnextin6minutes.com. Please subscribe to our weekly emails and follow us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Thank you for joining me, good-bye.