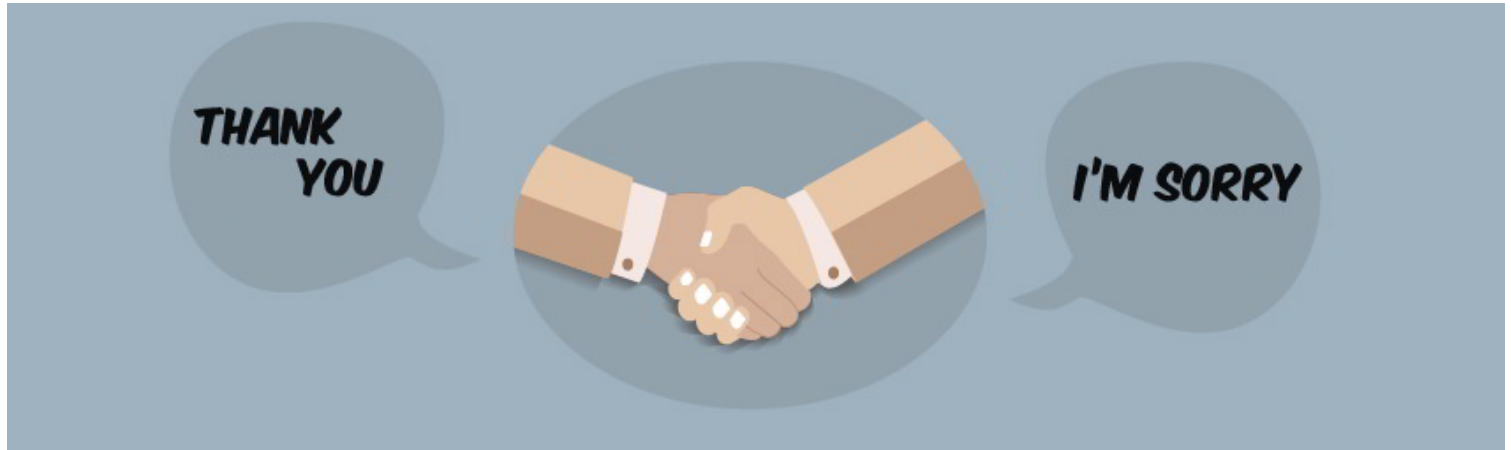


# 3 reasons saying 'I'm sorry' and 'Thank you' can change corporate culture



Companies that train their employees in what are commonly referred to as “soft skills” are finding those efforts pay off in productivity and retention.

People with soft skills are adept in areas such as interpersonal communication, leadership, problem solving and adaptability. But often still missing in the soft-skills department, some corporate analysts say, is the willingness to show an even softer side—specifically, saying “thank you” and “I’m sorry.”



**Keith Martino**

“Simple as they sound, those phrases—which most of us were taught by our parents as good manners—are often difficult for many people in the corporate culture to say,” says Keith Martino, author of *Expect Leadership* and head of CMI, a global consultancy that customizes leadership and sales development initiatives.

“But there’s a great value and power to saying ‘I’m sorry’ and ‘thank you’ in the corporate world. The first time someone apologizes or says a genuine ‘thank you,’ the whole environment shifts.”

Martino has observed corporate cultures becoming healthier when workers and leaders learn more about each other, care about each other and communicate better. As a result they work better together.

“So many people in today’s corporate culture have lived through not being valued in the workplace,” Martino says. “As we moved from the industrial age to technology, the thing that got left behind was the human element. People are starving for the human touch.”

Martino gives three reasons why saying ‘thank you’ and ‘I’m sorry’ carry power in the corporate culture:

- **It rebuilds relationships.** Leaders who can put themselves in the shoes of an employee whom they berated can build strong bridges throughout the company by apologizing and showing a more respectful approach next time. “People feel more valued and no longer threatened,” Martino says. “Every word you speak is an act of leadership as you influence others.” A thank you to a deserving employee also forges a more trusting, respectful relationship. “Being specific and genuine with the thank you heightens a person’s self-image, their view of the workplace, their boss and co-worker, and motivates them to keep up the good work,” Martino says.
- **It shows character.** Humility shown in saying “I’m sorry” is essential to leadership, as well as to the rank-and-file, because it authenticates a person’s humanity, Martino says. Saying “thank you,” he adds, reflects an appreciation for others that is essential in building a successful team. “Competence is no substitute for character,” Martino says. “When people see a co-worker or boss doesn’t thoughtlessly put themselves above them, bonds and productivity grow. Character is a key element that attracts people and builds the foundation of a company”
- **It energizes everyone.** It’s easy to get wrapped up in daily business obstacles or an overloaded email box and skip saying “sorry” or “thank you.” “But when these new habits are formed, showing that everyone values everyone else, a spirit of cooperation flows like a river throughout the company, creating a consistently positive culture,” Martino says.

“The relationship qualities, founded on mutual respect, that were common 100 years ago are still essential today,” Martino says, “and without them organizations fail. Walls go up, people get alienated and can’t work together anymore.”

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*Keith Martino ([www.KeithMartino.com](http://www.KeithMartino.com)) is head of CMI, a global consultancy founded in 1999 that customizes leadership and sales development initiatives. Martino is the author of Expect Leadership, a series of four leadership books: The Executive Edition, in Business, in Engineering, and in Technology.*