

The 'Repair in Action' Mini Guide

Building Innovation, Retention & Trust in the Workplace

For forward-thinking CEOs and Leaders

A workplace that fosters open communication and repair after conflict is a workplace where innovation thrives. When employees feel safe to speak up, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of blame, trust grows. This trust directly impacts retention—people stay where they feel valued, respected, and understood. A culture of apology doesn't weaken leadership; it strengthens it by creating psychological safety.

"Trust is built in the moments after tension—not before it."

Why Apology Matters for Innovation, Retention, and Trust

Most workplace breakdowns don't happen because of big betrayals — they happen because of small, unrepaired moments:

- An email that came off sharper than intended
- A meeting where someone felt unheard
- A decision that left a team member feeling sidelined

Left unaddressed, these moments quietly erode trust, fuel miscommunication, and slow innovation.

When leaders and teams know how to repair quickly, three things happen:

1. **Innovation thrives** – People take creative risks without fear of being “shut down.”
2. **Retention improves** – Employees stay where they feel safe, seen, and respected.
3. **Trust builds** – Teams move faster because they don't waste energy protecting themselves.

Repair is not weakness.

It's a competitive advantage.

The 3-Step 'Repair Model'

(for leaders)

1. Recognise – Acknowledge the tension or mistake without defensiveness. Leaders set the tone by openly recognising when something has gone wrong.

2. Relate – Show empathy and understanding of how the other person might feel. This step humanises the interaction and breaks down barriers.

3. Repair – Offer a clear, specific apology and propose a path forward. This turns a moment of conflict into an opportunity for connection.

"Conflict is inevitable. Disconnection is optional."

Quick Scripts for Handling Workplace Tension

When deadlines are missed: 'I see the impact this delay has caused. Let's talk about what happened and how we can adjust for next time.'

When feedback lands poorly: 'It seems my words didn't come across as intended. I value your contribution—can we revisit this conversation?'

When team members clash: 'I noticed there's some tension here. Let's pause and make sure we're hearing each other before we move forward.'

"A fast, respectful repair prevents a slow, costly fallout."

CEO Takeaways

1. Repair drives performance: High-trust teams innovate faster and adapt better.

2. Repair reduces turnover: People stay in environments where they feel respected.

3. Repair is a leadership skill: Apology models humility and emotional intelligence.

Start small: model one respectful repair this week and watch how your team responds.

Implementation Ideas for CEOs/HR

Weekly Courage Card Draw: At the start of each week, the team draws one card to practice that week.

Monthly Repair Roundtable: Leaders share examples of how they used the 3-Step Repair Model. Include the pass along ‘*Start With Sorry*’ cards.

Apology Wall: A private board where team members post anonymous “*Start With Sorry*” wins.

Leader Challenge: Executives model the cards first, showing vulnerability and setting the tone.

"The strength of a leader is measured in the bridges they rebuild."

Increase Productivity in the Workplace

Ideas for pass alongs cards for *Start With Sorry* in the workplace

Emotional Awareness & Self-Reflection

I realised I overreacted—I'm sorry. Let's reset.

I was short with you earlier. That wasn't fair.

I didn't listen properly. Can we try again?

My stress got in the way. You didn't deserve that.

I missed the mark on how I responded. I'm learning.

I could've handled that differently. Thanks for your patience.

I ignored your input—I'm sorry and open now.

I let frustration speak louder than kindness.

Repair Through Listening

I'm here to listen if you want to talk.

I didn't make you feel heard. Can we try again?

I want to understand your side—my door's open.

You matter to this team. Let's talk about what happened.

I'm sorry for not checking in sooner.

Repairing Relationships

Let's move forward—can we share ideas over coffee?

I'm grateful you're still on this team, even after my mistake.

I miss our easy chats. Let's start fresh?

Can we find a way to work better together?

Let's rebuild the trust—I'm committed to making this work.

I didn't mean to make you feel left out.

Thanks for giving me grace—I won't take it for granted.

Owning Mistakes

I misunderstood the assignment and caused delays—my bad.

I didn't pull my weight on that project. I'll do better.

I missed a detail that affected your work—I'm sorry.

I forgot to loop you in—that won't happen again.

I passed the blame. That wasn't right.

Creating a Safer Culture

Your feedback helped me grow. Thank you.

I want to be someone you can count on—always.

You deserved credit I didn't give—great job.

I'm making space for kindness today. You inspire that.

Let's celebrate progress over perfection.

Team Empowerment

I believe in what you bring to the table.

Let's support each other more intentionally.

You inspire me to lead with heart.

Today I choose responsibility, not excuses.

Let's normalize learning from mistakes—not hiding them.

Appreciation & Repair Combo

You handled that situation with grace—thank you.

I see your hard work—I'm sorry I didn't say it sooner.

I appreciate your patience while I grow.

Thank you for helping me see things differently.

I'm sorry for making assumptions—you taught me something.

Everyday Reset Cards

Let's try again—with a better tone.

I needed a moment to reflect. I'm ready now.

That meeting got tense—how can I make it right?

I want today to feel lighter for both of us.

I'm not perfect—but I care enough to improve.

Uplifting Repair Moments

Let's laugh this one off—and learn together.

Thanks for showing me grace—I'll pass it on.

You make work better—I'm sorry if I forgot to say it.

Here's to progress—not perfection.

I'm not afraid to say I'm sorry anymore—thank you.

Let's lead with care—today and always.

The 3-Step Repair Model

(To be printed and displayed in workplace breakout areas, leadership handbooks, and onboarding packs)

1.Acknowledge –

Name what happened and take ownership.

“I realise I interrupted you in the meeting, and I shouldn’t have.”

2.Apologise – Say sorry sincerely, without excuses.

“I’m sorry for not giving you the space to share your ideas.”

3.Act to Repair – Ask how to make it right and follow through.

“I’ll make sure you’re the first to speak in our next discussion. Is there anything else I can do?”

Why it works: Simple, fast, and lowers defensiveness. Research shows apology + action restores trust up to 90% faster.



30 Courage, Humility and Healthy
Communication Cards: Conversation starters,
prompts, and challenges that encourage team
members to act with courage, humility, and
healthy communication in difficult moments.



Speak up respectfully
about something
that's not working.

Give constructive
feedback to a peer
today

Ask for help instead
of struggling alone.

Share a mistake you
made and what you
learned.

Defend someone
who's being spoken
over.

Start a tough
conversation you've
been putting off.

Say no when you
can't take on more

Voice a new idea even
if it's risky



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Offer a solution
instead of just
pointing out a
problem.

Ask a quiet team
member's opinion in
a group discussion

Admit when you don't
know the answer.

Own your role in a
team problem.

Thank someone for
correcting you

Celebrate a
colleague's win
instead of competing

Ask for feedback on
how you could
improve.

Publicly give credit to
a teammate



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Apologise first even if
it's uncomfortable.

Ask for clarification
before assuming the
worst

Listen without
planning your
response.

Say "you're right"
when you've been
proven wrong.

Repeat back what
you heard to ensure
understanding

Ask open-ended
questions instead of
making statements

Use "I" statements
when discussing
issues.

Keep tone calm even
when frustrated.



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Choose the right time
for sensitive
conversations

Focus on behaviour,
not personality.

Check if someone is
open to feedback
before giving it

Acknowledge
emotions without
dismissing them

End a disagreement
by finding one thing
you both agree on

Start a meeting with
appreciation for the
team.

It takes courage to speak, humility to listen,
and wisdom to respond—together, they build
trust and make any workplace stronger.