

THE POWER OF AN APOLOGY

Gian Lozano MSW, MBA

- ▶ Mental Health Therapist and Consultant specializing in workplace dynamics, eliminating toxic culture and developing human capital.
- ▶ 25 years in behavioral health and business which supports my passion for developing people and organizations.
- ▶ Skills includes assessment, coaching, strategic planning, building high performing teams and employee engagement.
- ▶ Created the Employee Experience Framework (EEF).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- ▶ Most decisions are made as a result of people's feelings, emotions, perceptions and behavior.
- ▶ Trust is the foundation for employees, teams and organizations to reach their goals and thrive.
- ▶ A greater understanding of the value and power of an apology.



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LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ▶ An apology can potentially help mitigate the damage caused when trust is broken.
- ▶ In order to fully appreciate the value of an apology, we first must understand how important trust is in the workplace.



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THE VALUE OF AN APOLOGY

- ▶ Trust Defined: “ Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something (*Merriam-Webster, 2024*).
- ▶ “From a behavioral standpoint trust is often defined as is a person’s willingness to take risks upon the decisions and actions of others and providing support for mutually beneficial exchanges” (*Thanetsunthorn and Wuthisatian, 2020, p. 34*).

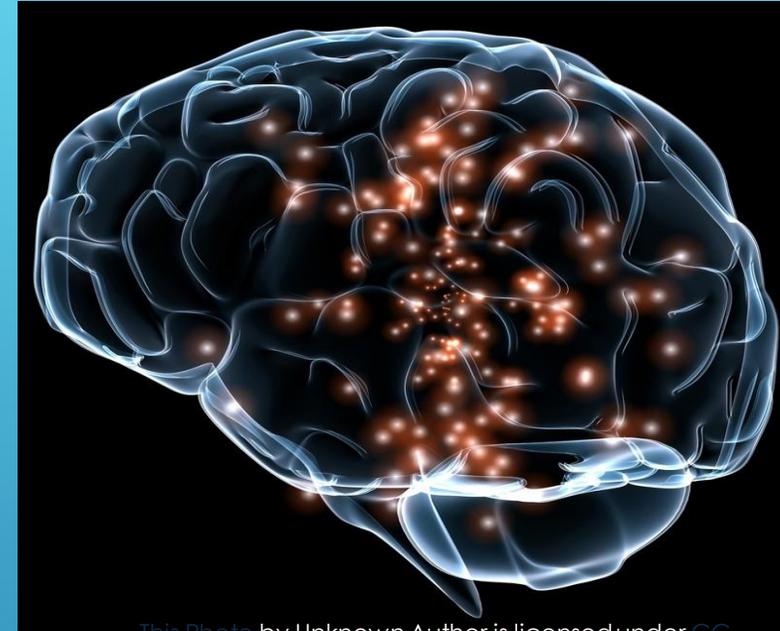
TRUST DEFINED

Galford and Draoeau report four different categories of trust:

- ▶ **Trust in leadership** (competence, fairness, caring and congruent actions)
- ▶ **Trust in your supervisor** (competence, fairness, caring and congruent actions)
- ▶ **Trust between colleagues** (culture of collaboration).
- ▶ **Trust in organizational policies and procedures** (fairness, congruent with a culture of trust) (2023).

**WORKPLACE TRUST REQUIRES A
SYSTEMS APPROACH**

- ▶ Studies show that the brain produces high levels of oxytocin in the presence of trust. Oxytocin was proven to do one thing “Reduce the fear of trusting a stranger” (Zac, 2023, p. 28).
- ▶ Oxytocin is also shown to reduce anxiety around others and motivates us to work together (Zac, 2023).
- ▶ Trust = **SAFE** vs. No trust = **DANGER**.



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NEUROSCIENCE OF TRUST

- ▶ Compared to low trust organizations, people in high trust organizations reported:
- ▶ 74% less stress.
- ▶ 106% more energy at work.
- ▶ 50% higher productivity.
- ▶ 13% fewer sick days.
- ▶ 40% less burnout.
- ▶ 50% employees plan to stay in the job for a year(Zac, 2023, p. 31).



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HAVING TRUST IN THE WORKPLACE

- ▶ Paul Zac (2023) reported a 76% increase in employee engagement compared with low trust organizations (p. 31).
- ▶ Organizations within the same industry having high engagement are associated with an average of 23% increased profitability compared to organizations with low employee engagement (Harter, 2022).
- ▶ Trust is at the heart of an organizations brand. (Cars, building houses, healthcare, etc.).

HIGH TRUST WORKPLACES

- ▶ Greater employee retention.
- ▶ Greater effectiveness with organizational development projects (Thanetsunthorn and Wuthisatian, 2020, p. 34).
- ▶ Higher levels of psychological safety, creativity and problem solving.
- ▶ Existing unions will have a reduced incentive to strike.



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HIGH TRUST WORKPLACES CONT.

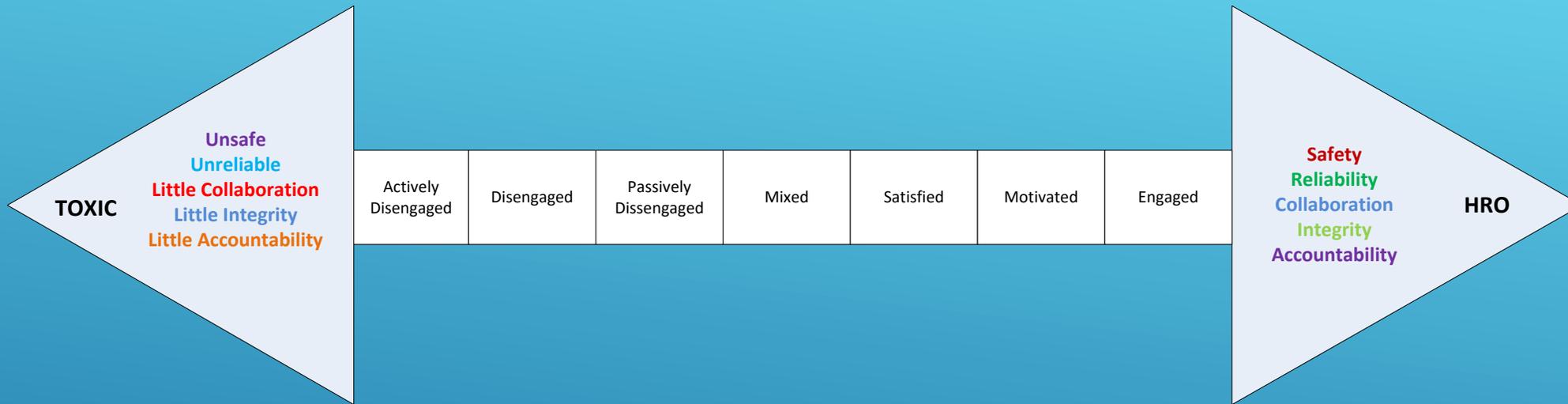
- ▶ High turnover and increased operational costs.
- ▶ Lower employee engagement, satisfaction and sustained motivation.
- ▶ Increased unionizing and voting to strike.
- ▶ Trust is at the heart of an organization's brand (Harvard, Facebook and Boeing).



LOW TRUST WORKPLACES

- ▶ Higher numbers of sick days and FMLA.
- ▶ Lower levels of buy in for new O.D. projects and overall organizational change.
- ▶ Toxic culture which is comprised of higher anxiety, fear, anger, depression, PTSD and possibly revenge.
- ▶ Reduced employee wellbeing, increased burnout and low levels of psychological safety.
- ▶ Challenges with Return to Office (RTO) transitions.

LOW TRUST WORKPLACES CONT.



THE SPECTRUM OF WORKPLACE TRUST

- ▶ Trust is established by positively managing people's feelings, emotions, perceptions and behavior consistently, over time.
- ▶ Trust is earned, not through being purchased, coerced, negotiated, bribed, or even just given freely.
- ▶ Trust is only minimally affected by increases in salary, benefits, bonuses and new IT platforms which are mistakenly used as the primary levers to create trust, motivation and high performance.
- ▶ When trust is broken an apology may be the only intervention to help make things right again.

PURPOSE OF AN APOLOGY

- ▶ Apology generally defined: “A combined statement of an acknowledgment of wrong doing and an expression of guilt” (Grover, Abid-Dupont, Manville and Hasel, 2019, p. 855).
- ▶ A high-quality apology has the potential to “initiate forgiveness, which is a deliberate decision for the wronged to relinquish anger, resentment, and a desire to punish” (Grover, 2019, et al, p. 855).
- ▶ A quality apology has the potential for healing to take place (*Harvard Mental Health letter*, 2008). Healing, in times of broken trust, allows for trust to be rebuilt and may potentially produce greater levels of trust by the presence of repeated trustworthy behavior (Grover, 2019, et al, p. 855).

POWER OF AN APOLOGY

- ▶ Apologies have been shown to reduce, or prevent tort claims, lawsuits, settlements in divorce (Curtis, 2023) and reduced medical malpractice payments (*Harvard Mental Health Letter*, 2008).
- ▶ “Apologies facilitate empathy toward the wrongdoer and is related to less retaliation as well as more favorable judgements toward the wrongdoer” (Miller, 2013, et al, p. 110) as well as restorative justice.



VALUE OF AN APOLOGY

- ▶ “Effective apologies have several components:
- ▶ Expression of remorse.
- ▶ Acceptance of responsibility.
- ▶ An account of the offense that does not include excuses, or justifications.
- ▶ An offer of restitution and a promise to change the behavior” (Miller, 2013, et al, p. 110).



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EFFECTIVE APOLOGIES

- ▶ Vassallo states the **assertion** is where you state the exact wrong that was done, express regret (2005) and remorse.
- ▶ Example: I'm truly sorry for allowing Joe's bullying behavior to continue unchecked as long as it has. I can really see how its negatively affected the team.
- ▶ The **acknowledgement** states the person(s) wronged deserved to be treated better and the wrong doer's actions were unacceptable, or inappropriate and without excuse (Vassallo, 2005).
- ▶ Example: I should have held Joe responsible sooner and put a stop to the bullying behavior. I realize this created a lot of fear within our department and helped create a toxic culture.

THE APOLOGY

- ▶ The **assurance** declares the wrongdoer will now do whatever it takes to prevent future wrongdoings (Vassallo, 2005).
- ▶ Example: This situation has shown me I must address toxic behavior without hesitation. Given this, I spoke with HR and the union and better understand the process to eliminate the bullying behavior. I will be implementing an engagement strategy that includes revisions to our code of conduct that we can discuss as a team.

THE APOLOGY CONT.

- ▶ The **adjustment** appropriately compensates the wronged (Vassallo, 2005).
- ▶ Example: I have carved out two days to begin rebuilding trust and having fun with our team. I know it's busy, but you are worth the investment. I will provide lunch at that little Italian place I know you all like.
- ▶ **Request forgiveness** from the person (S) wronged (Barber, 2009).
- ▶ Example: I truly value each one of you, so will you please forgive me for not addressing the bullying behavior sooner?

THE APOLOGY CONT.

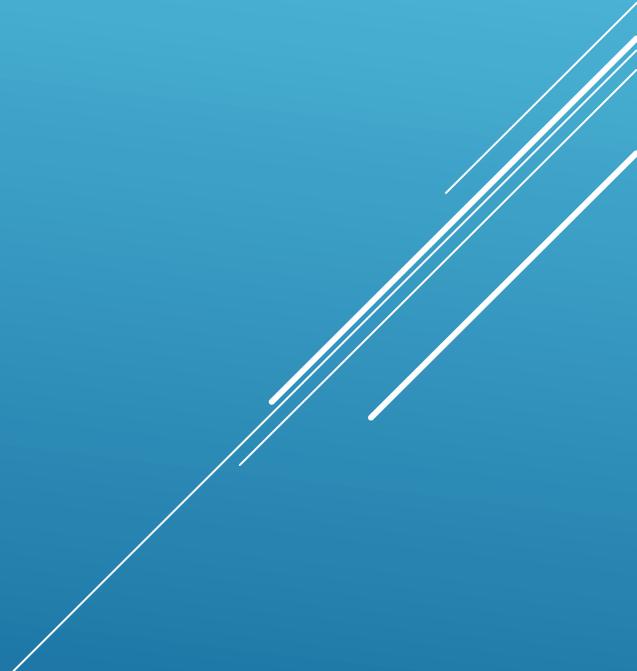
- ▶ A high-quality apology should be used when an acknowledgement is not enough (A lesser offense).
- ▶ If an apology is given too often it begins to lose its value and effect.
- ▶ Offer an apology to initiate the process of forgiveness, healing and the potential to reestablish trust.
- ▶ Future actions must be congruent with the apology in order to build back trust.



WHEN TO GIVE AN APOLOGY

Thank You
Questions?

contact Information
gianlcsw@gmail.com

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