

---

**Mike DeGagné**

## “I’m Sorry”

It is said we live in the Age of Apology. Governments and other public entities have discovered the wisdom of Apology, presuming that saying the right words has the power to heal. It allows those offering Apology to stand in a spotlight of grace and dignity.

*Do we invest as much time considering how Apology is received? How do recipients hear, feel, and use Apology to restore what was lost?*

For public institutions, Apology represents the triumph of empathy and understanding over cautious legal advice with an eye on liability. Some uplift us, others are shabby.

*How do we measure Apology? Should we measure it at all? Is it important for Apology to be sincere, or is the act of Apology a form of penance?*

We know when Apology is effective and when it misses the mark. It represents an opportunity to describe actions taken, and express our understanding of the harm that resulted. It is not always the best way to describe motives: “I chose an action, you were harmed, but I didn’t mean it.” Or worse still, “I meant well.” At the heart of Apology is an understanding of the harm caused and its impact: “I harmed you. I understand that it left

you diminished in many ways. And it resulted in real consequences in your life.”

The Indian Residential School System left a legacy in the Aboriginal community that is real and present. Canadian society often views this legacy as actions taken in the distant past, but Survivors of these institutions carry the burden of this system and its abuses even today. In recent decades we have seen churches, governments, public institutions, and individuals apologize and express regret for the Indian Residential School System. These apologies, some of which are presented here, convey an understanding of the impact of historic trauma on Aboriginal society decades later.

When reading these apologies we invite you to reflect on a few critical points:

Who delivered the Apology?

Does the Apology convey an understanding of the real impact of harms done?

Does the Apology re-establish the victim’s power by asking for forgiveness?

The real power of Apology comes afterwards, in the actions taken to set things right. Many apologies allude to “taking a different course in the future”, but for governments, institutions, and even churches this can be a difficult path. In the end the impact of Apology may be reflected in forgiveness and what remains on the hearts of those who receive them.