

# The-Power-of-Apologies-in-Bargaining-with-Myla-Hite

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

apology, myla, collective bargaining, acknowledging, important, people, relationship, apologizing, bargaining, situation, perc, gave, talk, folks, sincere, lera, feel, conversation, risk, point

## SPEAKERS

Myla Hite, Matt Greer

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**M** Matt Greer 00:09

We've all been there. We say the wrong thing, or we do the wrong thing. How do you handle that? In this episode of the PERColator Podcast, join me, co-host Matt Greer, and Myla Hite from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service as we explore what makes a good apology, and how that can be helpful in the bargaining process to help repair relationships, and move forward. As a side note, we're planning to do a follow up episode of the podcast, or perhaps a lunchtime zoom conversation on apologies. If you have an interesting take on apologies, or an interesting tale to tell, send us an email. We're at [negotiation@perc.wa.gov](mailto:negotiation@perc.wa.gov). Enjoy the episode.

**M** Matt Greer 01:01

Hello, hello. Welcome to the PERColator Podcast. My name is Matt Greer, one of your co-hosts, and I'm very honored today to have a guest to talk about apologies, Myla Hite. Hi Myla. How are you doing?

**M** Myla Hite 01:13

I'm doing great, Matt, thanks for having me.

**M** Matt Greer 01:15

Great to have you here. Looking forward to this conversation. Why don't you start off by telling us a little about yourself, your professional background, and what you do.

**M** Myla Hite 01:23

So I work for the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, which is a federal government agency. And I am a full time mediator. I've been doing that for going on about seven years now, prior to that I actually come from the management side of the house where I was a lead negotiator. And I had a long, long background in management, human resources, labor relations, a variety of things. And for a while I think that I met you I first met you working for the State of Washington. So that's where I come from. My agency is unique and that we exist to support labor-management relationships. So to that end, our primary function is to mediate labor- management disputes. So collective bargaining mediation similar to what PERC does. We do grievance mediations, as well. We do a lot of relationship development training, as well as outreach and education. We also have labor-management grants that are available to parties. So within the State of Washington, where PERC leaves off. We kind of pick that up, how's that?

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Matt Greer 02:31

Great. Thank you for sharing that. Yeah, for our listeners who are used to dealing with PERC, FMCS is kind of, in Washington anyway, does the private sector stuff here in Washington, whereas PERC kind of handles the public sector. So for those of you out there in the private sector definitely reach out to FMCS, they're a great resource. And if you're in the public sector, here at PERC, we're here to help you. So it's great when we have opportunities to work together with our FMCS colleagues because you are all wonderful. And it's always a great opportunity when we get to kind of do some, some cross projects here like this one. And I really appreciate you being here, Myla and telling us a little about that. So some of you may have Myla's name sounds familiar to you, and you went to the Northwest LERA conference, you may have gone to her session that she did on apologies. And that's kind of the inspiration for this episode. The Power of Apologies, first of all Myla, that that was a great session that you and Roger did, your colleague at FMCS, and that was the inspiration here. The focus of that session was kind of on general labor management relationships. And it was really, really interesting to have that perspective. But at the PERColator we kind of talk about how there are tools out there that make you a better bargainer and negotiator, and I thought there could be maybe a little little bit of a nuanced conversation about how the use of apologies and giving and or receiving apologies can make you a better negotiator over can build on that great foundation that you had for that session to talk about that here. Apologies are, I don't know, they're very powerful. I think that's that was kind of interesting, the title that you gave that session, the power of apologies, because they are extremely powerful. And they can help clear out bad feelings, they can reset the table that can build trust. But there's also that risk, right, that they're not properly done, they can make things worse, and they really need to be genuine. So I think in the bargaining context, especially, it's really important when everyone kind of knows each other a little bit and you know, have an ongoing relationship, it's even more important there. So I always like to think of apologies as maybe their version of early dispute resolution. I think we've all been in situations where it's like, in the moment, it's like, oh, my gosh, I really, really screwed it up. And I'm gonna apologize right now. And maybe what you did was actually a really bad thing that somebody could have filed a grievance over or an unfair labor practice over. But the fact that you acknowledge that right in the moment, that moment, and showed that you were wanting to fix it, it's kind of a way to to resolve those disputes, and maybe it doesn't have to grow into a bigger, bigger, bigger issue. I think there's a lot of power in that. But I don't know, Myla I'm curious if you have had any examples where an apology in the bargaining setting kind of changed the bargaining dynamics. I'm curious if you want to share anything on that front?

M

Myla Hite 04:56

Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that I do love though, before I get into that, is that you describe an apology as an early dispute resolution tool. And I think that that is so appropriate. And I think that if folks felt more comfortable owning something earlier, that it would really prevent the escalation of conflict. So thanks for pointing that out. And yeah, so I have so many different examples in the collective bargaining arena in the labor relations arena that I could use. But I want to talk about one that happened fairly recently, because in this instance, apology was a form of much needed recognition. And so most folks know that healthcare has really been struggling since the pandemic, right. And so I got called in at the 11th hour, a strike voted already been taken. It was a 943 member bargaining unit, and they were at loggerheads and things were going downhill pretty quickly. And I remember the energy in the room when I came in, and I introduced myself as an FMCS Commissioner, and they were negotiating in a fairly public setting, right. So the union wanted to have its members have an opportunity to be a part of that. So there was a viewing section. And then you had this large room in a conference hotel, a folks around an open U table who were negotiating. And so as I often do, I asked folks, you know, I gave my opening about who FMCS is, who I am, what mediation is, and I asked them to tell me where they were apart, right, because that's what mediation is about. It's about helping people who are in a dispute, find a pathway to move forward. So it focuses very much on what's getting in the way of that. And it was funny to me, because I was listening, and I was listening to the bargaining unit members, talking about the frustrations that they were experiencing. And most of them were very much pandemic driven, right, in flexibility in scheduling, long shifts, a lot of people left healthcare, because of the long hours because of the risks, not only to themselves, but they could carry it home to their family. So I kept hearing the bargaining team members talking about the things that were frustrating them. And I kept hearing the management team saying Yes, but. Yes, but. Yes, but we did this. Yes, but we did that. And what I really noticed was, there was a lack of empathy. And I think that a good apology contains an element of empathy, and empathy. In that regard, you can look at Celeste Headlee, the journalist, and she defines empathy as recognizing the emotion and suffering above us. Right. So as I was listening, as I was watching the dynamic play out, I noticed what was going on. So then, of course, when I'm in caucus with the management team, they asked me, they said, Do you think that a strike is the inevitable outcome? In other words, you know, they were feeling overwhelmed. And like it was hopeless, like there was nothing they could do. And so I engaged them in a conversation about how I did not believe the bargaining unit members were feeling any empathy from the management team. And what happened afterwards was amazing, the management team paid attention to that. And they went back and they re-looked at even some of the items that had been closed. And when we came back into joint session, it was the management teams turn to pass a proposal. And they began with an apology. They said, wow, until today, I don't think we really heard the message that you were telling us. And for that we are sorry. And what we want you to know. So there's that expression of regret, and there was some empathy. And what we want you to know, is that based on what we have finally heard from you today that we finally understand the message, we have gone back, and we have really looked at some of the items that we've closed, and we've decided to do this, this and this on those items that we closed. And here's our offer on the open items. The energy in that room was amazing, people on both sides of the table, because it was really stressful negotiations. Long hours, long time. You saw emotion you saw tears, but more than anything, the release of, "HA you finally get it!" And it was amazing, it turned everything around, and it settled, and life goes on. So, and I've seen many different incidents, or instances where one part or the other finally acknowledges and owns their part and decides to do something different. Right?

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Matt Greer 09:49

That's a great example, what I like about it is that it was an acknowledgement. I think one of the unique elements of the collective bargaining relationship is that you know, it's not like you're apologizing because you bump into a stranger at the grocery store. You're never gonna see them again. In the collective bargaining relationship, you're going to be seeing these folks all throughout that bargain. And even after the bargain is done, you're still going to have to be working together. And I think that the power of that apology that you just described, I think, implicit in that was like an acknowledgment that, hey, you know, we're in this together, and we're gonna make this work. And we want to show respect for you. And I think that's really, really an amazing, great example. Thanks for sharing that. So I thought maybe maybe we take a little step back and talk about what an apology is, because I think sometimes we all have an idea in our mind of what an apology is and probably pretty close, and I was curious, I went to the Merriam Webster definition of an apology. And it wasn't very satisfying. It was an admission of error or discourtesy, accompanied by an expression of regret, which I don't think is necessarily inaccurate, but it doesn't seem to kind of capture the full thing about what we're talking about here, and certainly what was demonstrated in that example you just gave. So I was trying to think, ok, how do I define it? And I thought maybe you know, an apology is an expressed acknowledgement, that I had a part in something going wrong, that had a negative impact on others and an offer to remedy the wrong and seek forgiveness. It's kind of how I think, if I'm evaluating my own apology as being good, I kind of think of that as the standard there. I don't know Myla, do you have any thoughts on that? And how would you define an apology?

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Myla Hite 11:14

Yeah, I really liked what you said. I do think, though, that apologies can be situational, right? Because maybe it's my wrong to remedy. If it is, I think that that's appropriate. Maybe it's not my wrong to remedy, maybe I can't do anything about it. Right? When I think give an apology, I really do think about that expression of empathy, letting you know that I understand, I get it, I understand what's going on for you. And so I also do think that it does recognize, when it's appropriate, my own accountability, so that forgiveness and that offer to do something different. So, again, I think it's situational, depending on the circumstances, what's appropriate. If I bumped into you, saying to you, I'm sorry, that's genuine, I'm not going to be able to remedy it, because that already happened.

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Matt Greer 12:00

Each situation is going to require a different type of response, right? Depending on the relationship and how big the wrong was. So one of the one of the pieces of the presentation that you gave at LERA, was you distill kind of six elements for a good apology. And I think some of them can be, you know, again, depending on the situation, and the relationship, might be more important than others. But I was curious if you might like, walk through those six elements that of what is a good apology? What are some components of a good apology?

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Myla Hite 12:28

So what I did is I made certain, I went back and looked at my slides, because I knew you're gonna ask me that question. Right? So and it does start off with, you know, expressing regret, which is, if I don't genuinely let someone know that I'm acknowledging what they've gone through, then that's not going to get much water, is it? And why should I even bother? It's not going to come across as genuine. And so I really do need to think and each situation, what is it I regret in the example that I just gave? You know, the management team was saying, We're sorry, we didn't hear you. I mean, we were listening to you, right? They're obviously listening. We didn't hear you. We weren't getting the message. And so they were sorry for them. And I think that's pretty cool. Sometimes it involves and oftentimes it explains an explanation of what went wrong, right. Like in that example, that I just gave it, it was we were so focused on, you know, being at the bargaining table, that we weren't paying attention to these things that you've experienced. And so that's the talking about what went wrong, oftentimes, that's helpful, because you know, we human beings, I don't know about you, Matt, but I'm a grown up, I like explanations. I like to know what happened. I like to know why it happened, by you talking to me about that, it lets me understand that you really are sincere, because you've looked at it, you've examined it, and also helps give me some reassurances that things don't happen in the future.

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Matt Greer 13:47

Right.

M

Myla Hite 13:48

And then acknowledging responsibility where you can, everything's not mine to own, however, where it is mine to own, that's part of people feeling, for lack of a better word, comforted, comforted that it's not going to happen again, I think that I am sorry, can be the three most overused words in the English language, when you're saying it, but yet the behavior doesn't change.

M

Matt Greer 14:10

Right.

M

Myla Hite 14:10

Right? And so I think that that acknowledging your responsibility can really go to that, then repenting, you know, that's the, I'm going to do it different, what's the commitment to the future being different? And that goes along with that offer to repair the wrong. You know, there are times that there are things within your power to do it differently. There are times when it's not, if there is certainly talk about it, and then requesting forgiveness that doesn't have to be long and drawn out and you don't have to overly beat yourself up for it. But I do think it's appropriate to check in with, I think that asking for forgiveness allows that element of interaction. So I can make certain that you and I are now on the same page. And sometimes it involves you saying what is it that you need in order to move on from here?

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Matt Greer 14:54

Right. Yeah, and I think it's a key piece of the bargaining piece. What can, what can we do to move forward, I want to be able to correct what went wrong. Let you know why, provide clarity, but moving forward, that's the the whole goal of going through this process and acknowledging this, it's a way to kind of move forward. And that's really important that bargaining, when you're trying to get to an agreement on something, I think sometimes it's a challenge for me to figure out like the repairing wrong and forgiveness, it's those are those are hard to do. Because sometimes I don't know how to repair the wrong, and it's almost scary to even think about what it what it might be that I have to do to repair the wrong.

M

Myla Hite 15:29

Yeah, and if I ask the question, I don't know what the answer will be.

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Matt Greer 15:35

Exactly, and if you request forgiveness, and the answer is no, I can't forgive you. That also is it's kind of a dangerous thing. But it's also maybe there's some value in knowing that as well, knowing where you where you stand. So those are all somewhat scary things to do. But I think that, you know, the the upsides hopefully outweigh the negatives there. And we will talk a little more about the negative, you know, the potential risks of apologies, because we don't want to ignore that. But hopefully, there's more upside generally.

M

Myla Hite 16:02

And I just want to add, though, that even if someone says, No, I don't forgive you. I agree with you, that is an important element to know, because then you haven't, that makes the follow up really easy. Okay, then given that we have a relationship, and we need to continue working together, what do we need to do in order to move forward and be successful? Because that's critical.

M

Matt Greer 16:21

It is, definitely. Especially when you're going to be working with each other, whether you like it or not, which in the collective bargaining relationship, a lot of times you are, so yeah, figure out what are the stumbling blocks there and having that conversation, I think it just starts a conversation if nothing else, and even if you end up at a point where you're feel a little queasy about where you end up, at least you kind of have a better sense of where you stand. The other risk is making a bad apology. And I think there's the only thing worse than not making an apology is, is making a bad apology and the consequences of that. I don't know there's a big, there's always a big red flag, if I'm apologizing and I use the word if, or if somebody's apologizing to me, and they say if, they use the word if, I my my ears are tingling, I'm like this is not a sincere, sincere thing. I need to reevaluate where I am or kind of question whether or

not they're really serious. And like the classic one is, oh, I'm sorry, if you feel that way, you kind of take the onus and put it on them. And it sounds kind of like an apology. But it doesn't come off as an apology. And it is just kind of does more irritating, than not.

M

Myla Hite 17:22

Yeah, I had that experience, again, at some point in time within the last year. And it was high, very, very tense negotiations. And I, I mean, I teach this stuff, and I know this stuff, right. And I really do see the power of it. And I do know that it works. And I actually said to someone, I'm really sorry you feel that way. Because I was sorry that they felt that way. And I wasn't finished, I would have said more. But instead of instead of me even being able to get to the next sentence, right? Because that came out first it was listen to you, Myla, listen to you. Do you hear yourself? You're sorry that I feel this way? I'm like, Yes, I am. And there's more. Even when you're bungle it, own that, own that. I knew that I should not try to defend that in that moment. That was gonna get me nowhere.

M

Matt Greer 18:11

Right. Move on to the next part as quickly as you can, right?

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Myla Hite 18:14

Yeah, yeah,

M

Matt Greer 18:16

I think people, they can sense that sincerity, and those little flat, and especially in the moment where somebody feels like they've been wronged by you, they're going to be looking for any little evidence that you're not sincere about what you're doing. And that it can be even true, even especially true, if there's, if there's little trust to begin with, which sadly, sometimes in the collective bargaining realm, there is very little trust to start off with. And so any little thing is going to be seen as evidence that you aren't really sincere about this. I think the other kind of risk about about apology here is if it feels transactional, like it's like, oh, you're just apologizing to me, because you want to get past this issue and get on to things that you think are more important. And you just think that that comes off as a big red flag too and I think especially in a collective bargaining context where it's like, you're just trying to get to get to a deal that you think is good, and this is just part of that, and you're just trying to get through this as quickly as you can to get to the other stuff. That can be kind of unsatisfying, as well.

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Myla Hite 19:09

Yeah. No, I agree with you. I mean, labor relations, I know that it's been said before, and I know it might even sound overused, but there's a relationship. There's a continued relationship, not only between the parties at the bargaining table, but the parties to the agreement. And sincerity goes a long way. And people know if you're not being sincere, you know.

M

Matt Greer 19:28

Yeah, they do, especially when you work together quite a bit, which is often the case. So the other part of your of your session that that was quite interesting, was you mentioned there was a, I think it was an English malpractice study and we'll try find a site that included in the show notes, but there was kind of the four things that when you're receiving an apology, there are four qualities that you can look for, to feel like this isn't a satisfying apology. So would you like to outline those for us to Myla?

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Myla Hite 19:53

Sure. So you're talking about there's an article that you can go find it was written by Lancet It was published in 1994 and that seems data, but the concepts aren't. And as I looked, even as I was getting ready to do the presentation for LERA, I was looking at everything that was written recently about an apology. It all comes from the study. And it's so it's, "Why do people sue? A study of patients and relatives taking legal action?" I remember back when I was an advocate, and I was trying to figure out this human dynamic. And how do you, what makes the difference in conflict escalating, as opposed to conflict de-escalating and so the only study I've ever found, and if you find, if anyone out there finds another one, send it to me, I'd love to see it, right? Because I look! It was in the United Kingdom, it was 227 families who were suing for medical malpractice. So the study was encompassing them and their their counsel. And so basically, what it was looking at was, and what came out of the study, was what makes the difference between whether someone goes on to sue or if a conflict escalates, or early dispute resolution, kind of like what you were talking about, or dispute resolution, and one of them is honesty. You know, and, and it's funny to me, because I think it runs counter to our risk management culture, in the American workplace, to have honesty, because we're taught, play your cards close to your vest, there are all sorts of expressions out there, in order to minimize risk. But that's not really what minimizes risk. People want honesty, they want an explanation about what happened. So you need to know what you're apologizing for. So they want to make sure that you know that, so to the extent you can, I always tell people, you know, don't do anything that's gonna blow your, your bargaining strategy. I'm not asking you to do that. But you can say, I'll share with you the things that I can share with you right now, that lets people know there's more, and I'm not gonna talk about it. But be honest, and be honest about the things you can. I don't know about you, Matt, I learned early on in my career, don't try to bluff your way through something. Right? So being honest, is important. Then then people want an appreciation for the severity of what they feel, you know, the impact of what they're feeling. And I can tell you that when the management team was saying to those folks, we're not understaffed, we don't have high turnover. And yet, there were certain functions that were not being performed in that healthcare setting, because there was no staff available to perform it, certainly didn't feel like there was any appreciation for what they felt, and it didn't feel like folks were being honest. And so that was getting in their way. And that leads to the next one, which is really important because people want accountability. They want the belief that someone will be responsible for whatever it happened, or from whatever's lacking, so that they can have assurances, because that's the next one that lessons have been learned, and things won't be repeated in the same way. So if folks can do that, especially if you get stuck at the bargaining table, if you can be honest, and share the things that you can, if you can express



that appreciation for what the other party's perspective is, and if you can own your piece in that and work together to make that commitment that things are going to be different in the future. That's what makes the difference. And that's what I talked about in the.

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**Matt Greer 23:11**

Yep, I think that was helpful. I'm, I'm curious to read that study if we have a link to it, because I was curious more about that. I did find some other other articles too, which I'll link to in the show notes about about this. And I'll reference one of those a little bit later on as part of that. Like when you're receiving an apology, there's also those intangible elements, that shows that this is serious, and I should take this apology serious, like the eye contact piece is really important. Nothing's worse than an apology, or somebody's kind of staring off to the side not making eye contact. I think in the Zoom environment, like making eye contact with the camera as opposed to like the the box where you see the person is also really important. Those little things can make a big difference, I think. It shows that you're sincere and not just checking the box. I think sometimes too, you know, if the wrong happened in front of a group of people, maybe it's important that the apology happens in front of a group of people as well. I mean, there is some parody there. And it could be worth thinking about that too, as you're evaluating what apology is appropriate. And then also it's really important and I am sadly I am not fully competent, probably a talk about all this, but there's the culturally based, the trauma informed, the neuro divergent, and the status differences that come along with all of our lived experiences in different cultures and different people who've had different traumas and may have other things going on. They might have a different way of apologizing and may have a different way of receiving apologies that maybe you are from your culture and being aware of that can be can be really important that there's a diversity out there in terms of how people react to apologies and, and status and that kind of thing that goes along with that. I do wonder I think sometimes the some of the best apologies that I've received from people have been non verbal. There was not never a word said but somebody wronged me and then they immediately corrected their behavior, their actions or did something to compensate it, and they didn't need to say out loud that it was an apology. But you know what? I bet you in my mind all the elements that Myla talked about were checked off. Do you have any other thoughts on that, Myla? Do you have other other intangible elements that you think are important to think about in the apology setting?

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**Myla Hite 25:13**

I think that in the collective bargaining sense, I think that what you talked about, about having it happen in front of the group, you know, if something's done in front of a group of people, I think it's important that they have the conversation in front of the group of people. Another thing that's an intangible is I do think it matters who in the collective bargaining context is giving the apology, my someone who has the authority to give those assurances that things are going to be different, because I think that sometimes, if you have someone who is in a position of authority, who is present at the table, and obviously you're gonna have people in work, but if you have someone who owns a certain segment, or a certain process, or certain part of the collective bargaining agreement, right, that's theirs to administer, or whatever, and they're present. And yet the lead negotiators, the person who says they're sorry, how does that come across? Because everyone's saying they looking to hear from the person who actually has the ability to give those assurances that things are gonna be different. And if that person is silent, I

think that can actually run counter to any words that are said, yeah, so I really like what you talked about in terms of behavior. And I think, I think the who is an important part of that behavior.

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**Matt Greer 26:20**

The more you think about all the things that go into a good apology, I mean, it's very easy to overthink it. I found I was like, Oh, wow, I didn't think about that. Yeah, it's really important. I think most of us can hopefully, it's intuitive to most of us. And we kind of adjust the way that we have, I think just being mindful about it is really important. In just this conversation, I think we have surfaced quite a few things that might make us think, "Yeah, maybe I should think about that a little differently next time." I'll be in a situation which I'm sure I will be sooner than later, or I need to apologize or somebody, I guess I wanted to talk about what do you do if you're in a situation where, yes, something went wrong. I don't think that I was, I was in the wrong, I genuinely don't think that I was in the wrong and I'm not really sorry about what happened, because I really didn't have a role in it. I mean, first of all, you want to think about that pretty carefully, because sometimes you might be wrong, but is there a way you can even in that situation, where you're not at the wrong, help move things over, and things that are maybe not full apologies, but might be important to be thinking about, to improve the relationship or move past a rough spot? So I was thinking of a few things. I'm curious Myla if you have any thoughts on that. But you know, acknowledging the impact, like even if you don't think you caused it, say hey, it's obviously this is a situation that's causing you some some discomfort or is in a bad, a bad spot. And I see that, I acknowledge that maybe even empathize a little bit, to kind of bring that into to the situation, again, that you, Myla mentioned earlier, listening to the situation, kind of give a better understanding of why we're in that situation and what's happening on that, and keeping that eye on the relationship saying, okay, you know, what, this is a bad situation for this person, and I'm in a relationship with that person in collective bargaining context. And I, in order for this to kind of go in a positive direction, I need to keep an eye on that and move this forward. So I don't know, there's, I think, Myla, you shared a story at the session about kind of a scheduling snafu where you weren't at fault, and but you know, somebody ended up waiting quite a bit because of something that was communicated, and I thought it was interesting how you handled that, and if you're willing to share a little more about that in the podcast.

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**Myla Hite 28:14**

I would love to, I would love to share about that. So, you know, I think that one of the most difficult things that we can do is scheduling right and getting it all right. And so there was a scheduler that had gone out. And then there was a need to change the location. I've also I also had happened one other time when there was a need to change the time. And so what do you do, you go back to the computer, you resend the scheduler, and then it goes out to folks. And theoretically everybody gets it. And once everybody's accepted a schedule, you don't know if they've seen a change or whether they've not, you can see that they've accepted. So we're sitting at the table, and we're waiting on a key player, and they're not there. So you can't start really bargaining, you can't really do anything until they come. And of course, I called them to say, Hey, what's going on. And they indicated that they were there. And that that's not, that's not where the negotiations were, the location had changed. By the time they got to the meeting room, they were frustrated, because think about that they were embarrassed that

they didn't know that a change had happened. And it would have been really easy in my first instinct, because nobody wants to do it wrong, my first instinct was to pull that scheduler out, you know, or show on this date on this time. But I didn't do that because what's that going to get us? It's not going to get us anywhere. The scheduler had been set, set well in advance, and for whatever reason, they didn't see it. And we've all done that at some point in time or the other. So instead of being defensive, I said, I expressed sympathy. I apologized. I said, I'm really sorry. You drove all the way across town and you said in an empty room wondering where everybody wants. That must have been incredibly frustrating. I can understand being angry about that. I know I would be because what a waste of your time, and you're here now you could just see the energy change, you can see them feel more comfortable. It didn't it cost me nothing, and that affirming the humanity of that other person, as opposed to explaining on this day, at that time, I did this thing. Where is that going to get you? So that was a story that I had shared.

M

Myla Hite 28:58

Here is the paper trail about why you were wrong, even though you're frustrated. Yeah, that's not usually very helpful, right?

M

Myla Hite 30:28

Not at all.

M

Matt Greer 30:29

There is a book called *Difficult Conversations*, I'll put a link to that in the show notes. But they talk about a concept called contribution, like when in the situations where you really don't feel like you're at fault. But if you look at what caused you to get into a situation where there's been some stress in your relationship, or there's been something that went wrong, looking at it and say, okay, you know, what, there's something that could have been done differently, I could have done something differently perhaps, to cause a different result. Thinking about that it way, and maybe that being a way to frame where you are, it may not be a I'm at fault, I need to correct the wrong, because, you know, because of that, but maybe there were some less severe contributions I made to the situation, and maybe acknowledging that, I think it can be helpful. So there was a whole chapter about that, in that book, that was kind of interesting, and I'm just barely touching on it here. It caused me to think about things a little differently, even those situations where I'm kind of in my brain putting the brakes on, thinking I'm not at fault here, I'm trying to think of, you know, ways to maybe acknowledge that in different ways.

M

Myla Hite 31:26

I really think that that's an important aspect of this entire topic, because within the collective bargaining arena, parties have history. And I'm not the same person today than I was two contract cycles ago, maybe two contract cycles ago, you know, I was that person. So I do think that what you're talking about, is important, looking at the contributing factors and kind of dismantling that, if you will.

M

Matt Greer 31:52

Yeah, I find myself using that as a way to reframe internally. I may not even say it out loud, but kind of reframing, okay, maybe there is a different way of looking at this, or maybe my role in this is a little different than what my knee jerk reaction is. So I found it helpful. I guess I did want to talk about, and I think it would be remiss, and we kind of touched on this a little bit, but that apologies can be risky. And I don't know, if you're, if you're in a context, where you deal with lawyers very often, they are the ones who might be pulling out the red flags. And you don't want to apologize in this situation, because there could be some, perhaps some litigation that may come about about it might affect your position there. So I do want to say that, you know that when you do apologize, that there is some risk on that front, the other party might take that as an indication that you're going to change your position on that. Like if you've made a proposal that you acknowledge may have been defective in some way, the remedy is that, Well, you need to make a proposal that's better than that, and meets me where I am. And that could be some of the risk of that in the collective bargaining context, it could be taken as acknowledgement of faults. You know, sometimes some of the things that happen in the collective bargaining context can be agreements or an unfair labor practice and acknowledging that you have fault in that may impact your position, if that does get to a point of a decision maker having to do that. So, so it's important to be aware of that, but I am going to link in the show notes, there was an article by a professor at, I think she was at Tulane University, Elizabeth Nowicki, and she says, it's an article, Apologies and Good Lawyering. And I think there was some parallels to collective bargaining and the advocacy elements of collective bargaining as well. But she makes the case that, you know, apologies are almost always going to be better to do with some some limitations, but that they usually are very helpful. So I'll leave that there are some some good thoughts in there. But just be aware that there are some risks there. I think the biggest risk is that your apology is not going to be accepted. And it might lead to a hard conversation about why your apology can't be accepted. That's what I, that's my biggest fear, when I make apology is the person is going to say, No, I can't accept, I don't accept your apology, because, and then they're going to tell me why. And I may not want to hear that. And I think that's really the scariest thing about an apology from the from my perspective. So I don't know Myla, do you have any of those risks resonate with you? Or can you think of any other risks that might be out there with making an apology?

M

Myla Hite 34:12

Yeah, I really, I really think that if you're not ready to have the hard conversation, you need to think about that. And I also think that as you become more seasoned and more experienced, you realize that unresolved conflict, and just because it's unspoken, it doesn't mean it's not there. And so I would encourage folks to welcome that opportunity and to seize that opportunity. Because that really conveys to someone, when you're willing to have that conversation, when you're willing to own your part and have that conversation to say, where can we go from here? That really conveys a lot of respect for the other person. So I think that's critical. I do think that the way that you give the apology is going to be critical, because you don't want to apologize in a way that looks like you're shirking ownership, and that you're pointing the finger at someone else. And I think you need to be very careful in the way your apology is framed for that reason.

M

Matt Greer 35:09

Yeah, but I will say, and hopefully we're on the same page here, Myla, is that even though there are some of those potential risks there, I think, as you pointed out, if apologies are made thoughtfully, that their positive power almost always outweighs those potential risks. And that was demonstrated during that Northwest LERA session that you did, there was some audience feedback. And I kind of pulled out a few of the comments that were made, I think definitely support that one of them was that you know, apologies cause a shift in the room and in a positive way that you're able to almost feel that dynamic change in the room when an apology is made and I think you described that pretty well Myla, in your first story that you told us today, and allows people to move on. Kind of get the elephant out of the room. It's like we have this friction point, somebody has acknowledged it, and it has made an offer to fix it, and now we are ready to move on. And that's great. And also, it's really important. I think we said the word you know, in the collective bargaining context, the relationship is super important. It's going to continue on, so the act of making an apology and accepting an apology, and having the conversation really does do a lot to strengthen that relationship. Even if it does have difficult elements to those conversations in the moment. They're definitely usually beneficial. So do you agree Myla, do you think apologies have a positive power that outweighs their risks?

M

Myla Hite 36:27

I absolutely agree with that. There's no doubt about that. I know that when someone apologizes to me in a way that I believe is sincere, that my respect meter for that person actually increases. And that actually draws me in and makes me want to participate in building the future. And I would hope that you would feel the same way. So I know if that's how that makes me feel. And I have enough and antidotal evidence from other people who have shared their stories with me as I've done this work, that I know that a well placed apology, that is sincere, it can mean the difference between going to loggerheads, stalemate, and it can turn the conversation so that people can really work together to accomplish making the workplace a better workplace because that's really what collective bargaining is all about.

M

Matt Greer 37:14

Better workplaces, better contracts, better everything. That's the payoff. Well, great, Myla, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me, I really enjoyed having this conversation with you and kind of taking that lead from your Northwest LERA session and kind of taking it in the more bargaining context. So I really enjoyed that. Thank you for your time.

M

Myla Hite 37:30

Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it. I appreciate the partnership.