

Who Taught Us That? Series

Why Do We Apologize Before We Speak?

Episode One

Podcast Listener Guide

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Why Do We Apologize Before We Speak?

Noticing when courtesy quietly becomes unnecessary apology.

Reflection Focus

This first episode of Who Taught Us That? invites us to notice the small apologies that can slip into ordinary communication. The goal is not to eliminate sincere apologies. It is to examine when “I’m sorry” accurately fits the moment and when it may be standing in for a question, a request, gratitude, clarification, disagreement, or a need.

Private Check-In

Before I move through this guide, where do I notice myself apologizing most often even when I have not actually done anything wrong?

From the Host

This guide is designed as a private reflection space for Episode 1: Why Do We Apologize Before We Speak? It is not an invitation to monitor every sentence or criticize the way you communicate. It is a place to notice patterns with curiosity, consider where they may have come from, and practice language that more accurately reflects what you mean.

Move through the questions at your own pace. You may recognize habits that once helped you navigate a particular environment. The goal is not to shame those habits. The question is whether they still belong in every room you enter.

This episode is for you if:

- You notice yourself saying “I’m sorry” before questions, requests, follow-ups, opinions, or needs.
- You sometimes worry that being direct will make you sound rude, demanding, or difficult.
- You want to communicate clearly without giving up kindness, consideration, or respect.
- You are used to being the dependable one and find it uncomfortable to ask for help.
- You want to examine not only how you speak, but how you interpret other women who speak clearly.

How To Use This Guide

Move through one or two chapters at a time. Use the blank lines for honest observations, examples, prayers, questions, and small communication shifts you want to practice. Awareness comes first. You do not have to correct everything at once.

Episode Description

Have you ever heard yourself say, “I’m sorry...” before asking a question, expressing an opinion, following up, or simply saying what you need?

In the first episode of our new series, Who Taught Us That?, Denise Williams and guest co-host Tonya examine why unnecessary apologies can become so automatic that we barely notice them.

They explore the difference between courtesy and apology, why direct communication can sometimes feel uncomfortable, and how experiences in family, work, culture, and other environments may shape the way women learn to communicate.

The conversation also asks us to look beyond how we speak and consider how we respond when other women speak clearly. Is she actually being rude, or are we simply accustomed to hearing women soften what they say?

Denise and Tonya also discuss what happens when being the dependable one becomes part of our identity and why asking for help can sometimes feel like something we need to apologize for.

This episode is not about eliminating sincere apologies. It is an invitation to notice when “I’m sorry” is actually necessary and when another phrase may more accurately communicate what we mean.

This Week’s Question

Who taught us that speaking clearly requires an apology?

Chapter 1: Why Do We Apologize Before We Speak? | 0:00

Listen For

The episode opens by noticing how often an apology can appear before anything has gone wrong. Listen for the distinction between a sincere apology and an automatic phrase used before a question, opinion, follow-up, request, or need.

Personal Reflection

Where do I most often hear myself say “I’m sorry” before I have actually done anything wrong?

What do I think the apology is protecting me from in those moments?

Private Line

The apology pattern I want to notice first is...

Chapter 2: When “I’m Sorry” Becomes a Habit | 4:14

Listen For

Listen for how unnecessary apology can become verbal autopilot. The words may no longer match what we actually feel or intend. Notice the examples around follow-ups, contracts, and the pressure to prove that we are reasonable before making a reasonable request.

Personal Reflection

What phrase do I use automatically to soften a request or follow-up?

If I removed the apology, what clear and respectful sentence could I use instead?

Private Line

One sentence I want to practice saying more directly is...

Chapter 3: Who Taught Us That? | 8:48

Listen For

Communication habits can be learned through family, culture, school, church, work, and observation. Some strategies may have helped us navigate difficult environments. The question is whether every strategy still needs to follow us into every room.

Personal Reflection

Where do I think I learned to soften myself before speaking?

Am I still responding to an old environment even though the room has changed?

Private Line

One communication rule I am ready to examine is...

Chapter 4: Apology or Courtesy? | 12:41

Listen For

Courtesy and apology are not the same thing. Listen for the practical substitutions: “Excuse me,” “Thank you,” “I see it differently,” and other phrases that may better describe what is actually happening.

Personal Reflection

Where have I confused being courteous with apologizing?

Which replacement phrase feels most natural for me to begin practicing?

Private Line

A phrase that more accurately says what I mean is...

Chapter 5: When Clarity Feels Like Confrontation | 14:22

Listen For

Clear communication can feel uncomfortable when we are accustomed to a great deal of softening. Listen for the invitation to examine both sides: how we speak and how we interpret another woman who communicates plainly.

Personal Reflection

When someone speaks directly to me, what makes me decide whether she is clear or rude?

Have I ever judged another woman's tone simply because she did not soften her message the way I expected?

Private Line

Before I label directness, I want to ask myself...

Chapter 6: Are We Apologizing for Having Needs? | 18:56

Listen For

For someone who is usually capable, dependable, or the helper, needing assistance can feel unfamiliar. Listen for the difference between receiving help with gratitude and treating your need as evidence that you are a burden.

Personal Reflection

How comfortable am I asking for help without explaining or apologizing for the request?

What belief about being capable may make it harder for me to receive support?

Private Line

One need I can express without apologizing is...

Chapter 7: A Little Self-Check | 22:12

Listen For

This section turns awareness inward. Notice when "sorry" appears around questions, preferences, clarification, saying no, correcting an error, or asking someone to repeat themselves. Awareness is information, not an accusation.

Personal Reflection

Which situation from this self-check sounds most familiar to me?

What would respectful clarity look like in that situation?

Private Line

The next time I notice "sorry," I want to pause and ask...

Chapter 8: The Apology Challenge | 24:18

Listen For

The challenge is simple: notice unnecessary apologies for one week. If you owe an apology, give it sincerely. If you do not, consider whether another phrase more accurately communicates what you mean.

Personal Reflection

What would change if I treated this week as observation rather than correction?

Which replacement phrase do I want to keep readily available?

Private Line

This week, I will practice noticing...

Chapter 9: What Are We Still Carrying? | 25:35

Listen For

The conversation returns to the larger series question. Some communication strategies may have protected us or helped us navigate a previous season. Growth can include appreciating why we learned something while deciding whether it still fits who we are today.

Personal Reflection

What communication habit may have served me once but deserves another look now?

What feels different about the rooms I am entering today?

Private Line

One old rule I may no longer need to carry is...

Chapter 10: Save the Apology for What Needs One | 27:33

Listen For

The episode closes with the reminder that kindness and clarity can coexist. Your voice, question, presence, request, opinion, or need does not automatically require an apology.

Personal Reflection

What is the biggest distinction I am taking from this episode?

How do I want my communication to feel after practicing this for a week?

Private Line

The truth I want to carry forward is...

Listener Challenge

For the next week, notice when “sorry” shows up in your conversations.

Ask yourself:

Did I actually do something that requires an apology?

If the answer is yes, apologize sincerely.

If the answer is no, consider whether what you really mean is:

- “Excuse me.”
- “Thank you.”
- “I have a question.”
- “Could you help me?”
- “I need clarification.”
- “I see it differently.”
- “I’m following up.”
- “I’m not available.”

Awareness comes first. You do not have to criticize yourself for the habit. Just notice it.

Key Takeaway

Courtesy and unnecessary apology are not the same thing.

You can communicate with kindness, consideration, and respect without apologizing for every question, request, opinion, or need.

Call to Action

Did this conversation make you recognize one of your own communication habits?

Share the episode with another woman and ask her:

“Do you do this too?”

Then join the conversation with us on social media.

Practice Tracker

Use this tracker as a private check-in, not a grading system. The goal is awareness, accuracy, and respectful communication.

Day	Reflective Practice	Done / Notes
Day 1	Notice every time "sorry" appears before a question or request.	_____
Day 2	Replace one unnecessary apology with "Thank you," "Excuse me," or a direct question.	_____
Day 3	Notice whether you soften a follow-up because you fear sounding demanding.	_____
Day 4	Pay attention to how you interpret another woman who speaks clearly.	_____
Day 5	Ask for one small thing you need without apologizing for needing it.	_____
Day 6	Notice whether an old environment is still shaping how you communicate today.	_____
Day 7	Review the week and choose one communication habit you want to continue practicing.	_____

Notes and Reflections

Next Steps and Commitments

One communication habit I want to keep noticing:

One phrase I want to practice using instead of an unnecessary apology:

One truth from this episode I want to carry forward:

About the Host

Denise Williams is an award-winning creator, executive producer, and the founder of She Thinks She's Cute™. Through storytelling and leadership-forward conversations, she explores perception, identity, and the unspoken dynamics that shape how people see themselves and one another. Denise is also a certified coach and speaker with the Maxwell Leadership Team, where she focuses on personal growth, leadership development, and intentional decision-making.

Closing

Thank you for listening and taking time to reflect. Speaking clearly does not require abandoning kindness, and sincere apology still matters when an apology is truly owed. The invitation this week is simply to notice the difference.

You can honor the communication habits that helped you navigate earlier seasons while still choosing language that more accurately reflects what you mean today. Awareness comes first. Let the noticing teach you something.

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Ownership Notes

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