

You've apologised enough

A short book about saying sorry for things that aren't faults, and what it teaches people about you

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit. You say sorry. Someone bumps into you in a doorway and you say it. You open an email with it. You say it before you ask a question, when the food is late in a restaurant you didn't cook in, when you have a cold, when you have an opinion. By lunch you've said it forty times and none of them was for anything you did. You've been told to stop, more than once, and you've said sorry for that too.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the habit makes sense from the inside. Sorry is polite, it's cheap, it keeps things smooth, and the alternative feels rude. The second is that sorry isn't cheap. Every apology trades a little competence for a little warmth, and forty a day is forty trades, and the people around you have been reading the balance. People apologise in proportion to what they count as an offence, so apologising more means counting more of your own ordinary actions as offences, and that counting is the habit. The reflex sorry devalues the real one, so that when you've done wrong your apology sounds like the one you said about the rain. And a sorry before a question frames the question as an intrusion, and teaches everyone that your requests are favours. The third is practical. You say sorry when you've done something wrong, fully and once, and for everything else you say what you mean. Chapters 20 to 23 cover how.

This book doesn't ask you to stop apologising, to become blunt, or to refuse to say sorry when you've caused harm. It asks you to save the word for the times it's true, and it'll show you that those are

rarer than you've been treating them, and that the real sorry lands harder once the reflex has gone.

Two cautions.

If the sorry comes from fear, if you apologise to someone you live with to manage their moods and keep yourself safe, that isn't a habit and this isn't the book. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is free and open day and night on 0808 2000 247.

And if the sense of being in the way has become a low mood that's there most of the day and has been for two weeks, see a GP. The NHS has guidance on low self-esteem and I'll come to it, but low mood is a different thing and needs a different door.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Sorry, quick one

You're in the doorway at work and someone comes through the other way and walks into you. "Sorry," you say. They were the one who wasn't looking. At your desk the first email of the day opens "Sorry to bother you," and it's to a colleague whose job is to answer that exact question. In the meeting you have a thing to say and it comes out as "Sorry, can I just," and the thing gets said, and it was a good thing, and it arrived apologising for itself. At lunch the food is slow and when it comes you say sorry to the waiter for having asked where it was. You've got a cold and you say sorry for coughing. Dev, at the next desk, asks the same colleague the same sort of question at eleven, and opens with "Quick one," and gets the answer, and nobody thinks anything of it.

These are invented but I'd guess yours is close. Count, if you can bear to, and most people who count find the number before lunch is somewhere between twenty and forty, and that not one of them was for anything they'd done wrong. The doorway wasn't your fault. The question was your job. The cold was a cold.

Some words. I'll call a sorry that isn't for a fault **the reflex sorry**, and a sorry that is, **the real sorry**. A **fault** is something you actually did wrong. The sorry that opens a question or request, "sorry, quick one", "sorry to bother you", I'll call **the softener**. The sorry about things nobody caused, the rain, the queue, the late food, I'll call **the weather sorry**. What people conclude about you from all of this I'll call **the read**. The count from a day is **the day's sorries**. Replacing sorry with thank you, which will turn out to be most of the method, is **the thanks swap**. What you count as an

offence, which is the thing this habit really is, I'll call **the threshold**, and I'll credit the researchers who use that word in chapter 4. And the exchange of a little competence for a little warmth that every apology involves, I'll call **the trade**, and credit that too.

Before you go on, do one thing. Tomorrow, count the day's sorries. A mark for each one, on paper or your phone. Then, next to each mark, a second mark if it was for something you actually did wrong. Don't change anything. Most people who do this find the first column long and the second nearly empty, and the gap between them is the habit, and it's the subject of this book.

Why sorry seems right

Before I argue with the reflex, I want to be fair to it, because it comes from a good place and the people who do it are mostly the kind ones.

It's politeness. Sorry is the oil of British life. It's what you say in doorways and queues and it costs nothing and it keeps things moving.

It's kindness. The waiter's had a hard shift. The colleague's busy. A sorry says you've noticed that they're a person with a day, and that's a decent thing to say.

It's cheap. One word. It can't do harm. If it's unnecessary, so what.

It avoids conflict. A sorry in a doorway ends the doorway. Without it there'd be a look, or a word, and you'd rather not.

It's humility. You don't think you're more important than the people you're asking things of, and the sorry says so. Arrogant people don't apologise. You'd rather err the other way.

It's how everyone talks. Listen to any office. Sorry is the first word of half the sentences.

It's a reflex, by now. The word is out before the thought that would have stopped it, and a word that's been said forty times a day for twenty years isn't a decision. It's the shape your mouth makes in a doorway.

And it's you. You've always been the one who says it. It's part of how people know you, and it's not the worst thing to be known for.

There are needs under all of this. To be polite. To be kind. To be liked. Not to be thought pushy. Not to cause trouble. Those are good needs and the method later in the book meets every one of them. What I'll show is that the reflex sorry meets them badly, that it costs more than a word, that it's read as something you don't intend, and that the kindness you mean arrives as something closer to a small confession, forty times a day, of a fault nobody thought you'd committed.

"It's just politeness"

Start with the belief that sorry is free. It's a courtesy word. It doesn't mean anything. It's just what you say.

Shereen Chaudhry and George Loewenstein, in 2019, set out a theory of four things people say that seem cheap and aren't. Thanking, apologising, bragging and blaming. Their argument, tested in two experiments, was that all four carry information about credit and blame, and that each involves a trade between two things people want to appear to be, competent and warm. When you apologise, you take blame onto yourself, and that reads as warmth, because you're putting the other person's feelings above your own standing. It also reads as a small loss of competence, because a person who's at fault is a person who got something wrong. The words are cheap to say. What they do to how you're seen isn't.

Apply that to the day's sorries. Forty a day, none of them for a fault, and every one of them a small trade. Each says, to whoever hears it, "I'll take the blame here", and each one buys a little warmth and spends a little competence. Over a day that's forty small spends. Over a year in the same office it's thousands, and the people around you have been keeping the balance without knowing they were, and the balance is the read. It says warm, and it says junior, and it says the sort of person who'll take the blame, and none of that was your intention in the doorway.

So "just politeness" is true of the word and false of the effect. The word is a courtesy. The effect is a transaction, and the researchers' point is that the transaction is what makes the word worth anything. If sorry really were free, it would carry no information and a real apology would mean nothing. It's because sorry costs competence that the real sorry works, and it's for the same reason that forty reflex ones a day are expensive.

I'm reaching from a theory of communication to a doorway, and I'll say so. But the shape holds. You've been treating a word that has a price as a word that hasn't, and paying the price all day.

"It's what British people say"

Here's the belief that makes the habit feel like culture. Everyone here says sorry. It's the national word. A book about it is a book about being British, and you're not going to stop being that.

Karina Schumann and Michael Ross, in 2010, set out to test a different stereotype, that women apologise more than men, and what they found is more useful for this book than the stereotype was. In a diary study, people recorded every offence they committed or experienced each day and whether an apology was offered. Women did report more apologies. They also reported committing more offences. And when the researchers looked at the proportion of offences that got an apology, there was no difference between men and women at all. People apologised for what they counted as an offence, at the same rate. The difference was in what they counted. In a second study, men rated the same offences as less severe than women did, and those ratings predicted both whether an apology was thought to be owed and whether one was given.

Set the gender aside for a moment, because chapter 15 is about that, and look at the mechanism. Apologies track perceived offences. People apologise for the things they count as having done wrong, and the difference between a person who apologises forty times a day and one who apologises twice isn't politeness or nationality. It's the threshold. The forty-a-day person counts forty of their own ordinary actions, standing in a doorway, asking a question, coughing, as offences. The twice-a-day person counts two.

That's the habit, and it's not about Britain. Dev, at the next desk, is as British as you are, and says "quick one" where you say "sorry to bother you", and the difference is that Dev doesn't count asking a colleague a question as an offence, and you do. The threshold is the thing to look at, and the threshold can move, because it's a judgement about your own actions and not a fact about your country.

"It's what British people say" is true and beside the point. Plenty of British people say it twice a day. What you're describing is a threshold set low enough that most of what you do all day clears it, and the sorry is just the sound that threshold makes.

"It shows I'm considerate"

Here's the belief with the best evidence behind it, and I want to give it its due before I take it somewhere else.

Alison Wood Brooks, Hengchen Dai and Maurice Schweitzer, in 2013, studied what they called superfluous apologies, expressions of regret for things the speaker plainly didn't cause. The rain. The traffic. Across four studies, a superfluous apology increased the listener's trust in the speaker, and the mechanism was empathic concern. Saying "I'm sorry about the rain" told the other person that you'd noticed their situation and minded about it, and they trusted you more for it. In one study a stranger at a station asking to borrow a phone was more likely to be lent it after apologising for the weather.

So the weather sorry works. Once, from a stranger, it does exactly what you intend. It shows you've noticed the other person's day, and they warm to you. I'm not going to pretend otherwise, and if the day's sorries were one weather sorry to one stranger, this would be a short book.

Now look at what the study didn't test. It didn't test the fortieth apology of the day to the same colleague. It didn't test the sorry before every question, to people who hear it every time you speak. It tested a single act of noticing, between people who didn't know each other, and found that a single act of noticing is trusted. The same words, said every hour to people who've heard them a

thousand times, aren't an act of noticing. They're a tic, and a tic doesn't carry empathic concern, because everyone knows it isn't about them. It's about you.

Chaudhry and Loewenstein's trade from chapter 3 is what happens when the stranger becomes a colleague. The first sorry buys warmth. The thousandth has bought all the warmth there is to buy and is still spending competence, and what's left is the read.

So keep the weather sorry for strangers. It's a kind thing and the research says it lands. What the book is about is the forty a day to people who know you, where the kindness has long since been received and the trade is all that's left running.

"It smooths the way in"

The softener is the sorry that opens a request. "Sorry, quick one." "Sorry to bother you." "Sorry, can I just." You'd say it helps. It signals that you know you're interrupting, and the signal makes the interruption easier to take.

Consider what the softener tells the listener about the request. It says this is an intrusion. It says the asker knows it's an intrusion. It says the asker feels they need permission to make it. All of that is information, and all of it is false, because the question was your job and answering it is theirs, and nobody is intruding on anyone. The softener has taken an ordinary exchange between colleagues and framed it as a favour being begged, and the listener, who had no such thought until you supplied it, now has it.

An earlier book in this series, about not asking for help, describes the over-apology around a request and what it does to the request's chances. I'll borrow one point. A request that arrives apologising for itself invites the listener to treat it as optional. "Sorry to bother you, could you possibly" is a sentence with three exits built in, and a busy person takes an exit. "Quick one, when's the deadline for the north report?" is a question with no exits, and it gets an answer. Dev gets answers.

There's a second thing the softener does, and it's slower. Every "sorry, can I just" in a meeting is a small announcement that you don't think you have the floor by right. Said once, nobody notices. Said at the start of everything you say for three years, it's the read,

and the read is that you're the one who asks permission to speak, and people who ask permission are given it, or not, by people who don't.

Smoothing the way in isn't what the softener does. It roughens it, by turning a question into an apology with a question attached, and the method in chapter 21 is a set of sentences that get the question into the room without the apology in front of it.

"Better too many than too few"

There's a fear at the bottom of all this, and it's of the other kind of person. The one who never apologises. Who bumps into you and walks on. Who gets it wrong and blames the brief. You know that person and you'd rather be you, and if the price of not being them is forty sorries a day, you'll pay it.

Tyler Okimoto and colleagues, in 2012, looked at what refusing to apologise does for the refuser. In two studies, people who refused to apologise for something reported higher self-esteem afterwards than people who didn't refuse, along with a greater sense of power and control and of having stood by their values. Refusing felt good. The researchers presented this as a problem, because it explains why people who've done harm dig in, and I'd present it the same way. The non-apologiser isn't a model. They're a person who's found that not saying sorry feels powerful and is spending that feeling at other people's expense.

So the fear is pointed at a real thing. I'd just ask you to notice that the choice you've set up, forty sorries or none, isn't the choice. Nobody in this book is asking you to refuse an apology you owe. Chapter 22 is about making the ones you owe better. What the book asks is that you stop apologising for the doorway, the question and the rain, and that isn't the non-apologiser's refusal. It's the ordinary position of most people, who say sorry when they've done something and don't when they haven't, and who are neither doormats nor bullies for it.

"Better too many than too few" assumes that the sorries are all the same kind, so that more of them is safer. They're not. Too many reflex sorries and too few real ones is exactly the position chapter 8 describes, and it's the worst of both. A person who says sorry forty times a day for nothing has, when they finally do something wrong, a word that's worn through, and the apology that matters most is the one that lands least.

The middle isn't a compromise. It's where the real sorry lives.

"A sorry costs nothing"

You'd say, even granting the trade, that a sorry is a small thing and there's no limit on them. You can issue as many as you like. Nobody runs out.

Roy Lewicki and colleagues, in 2016, studied what makes an apology work. They identified six components from earlier research, acknowledging responsibility, explaining what went wrong, expressing regret, declaring that you'll do better, offering to repair the harm, and asking for forgiveness, and tested them singly and in combination. Apologies with more components were judged more effective than those with fewer, and some components mattered more than others. Acknowledging responsibility mattered most. Asking for forgiveness mattered least. An apology, in other words, is a structured thing, and it works because of what's in it, and a bare "sorry" is the smallest unit of it.

Now think about what the reflex sorry does to that structure. It takes the smallest unit, the one word, and issues it forty times a day for things that had no responsibility to acknowledge, no harm to repair and no regret to express. A currency printed too often is a fair comparison for two sentences. Each note is still a note, and none of them buys what it used to.

Here's the cost, and it's the one that convinces most people. When you've actually done something wrong, forgotten the thing, snapped at someone, let a friend down, the word you reach for is the one you've said forty times today about doorways. The listener has heard you say it about the rain and the cold and the fact that

you asked a question, and now you're saying it about a real fault, and it sounds the same. It has to. It's the same word from the same person in the same tone, and the listener can't tell the real sorry from the reflex one, because you've spent years teaching them that your sorry means nothing in particular.

So the reflex sorry does cost something, and what it costs is the real one. A person who saves the word for faults has a word that means fault. A person who says it for weather has a word that means weather, and when the fault comes, the word for it has already been used up.

"It's only a word, nobody hears it"

Here's a belief that lets the day's sorries pass unexamined. They're background. Nobody registers them. The colleague hears the question, not the sorry in front of it. The waiter hears the order. You're the only one keeping count, and you're only counting because a book told you to.

Two things. The first is that somebody did hear them, because somebody told you to stop. Most people who pick up this book have been told, by a partner or a friend or a manager, that they apologise too much, and that sentence is evidence that the sorries were registered, counted, and found worth mentioning. People don't remark on things they haven't noticed. The person who said "stop apologising" had been hearing every one for months and finally said so.

The second is how the read gets built, and it's the same way anything gets known about anyone. Not from what's said once. From what's said most. Chaudhry and Loewenstein's trade in chapter 3 is a small thing, per sorry, and the smallness is exactly why it's dangerous, because small things repeated are what people learn from without knowing they've learned. Nobody sat down and concluded that you're junior. They heard sorry forty times a day for three years and the conclusion assembled itself, and if you asked them why they think what they think about you, they'd struggle, and they'd think it anyway.

Consider the reverse. If nobody heard the sorries, the read wouldn't exist, and you'd be treated exactly as Dev is. You aren't. Something has produced the difference in how the two of you are treated, and the difference in what the two of you say forty times a day is the only candidate on the table.

So the sorries are heard. Not as events, but as weather, which is the way the most important things about a person get heard. You've been broadcasting a small message all day for years and assuming the volume was too low to carry, and the message has arrived, and it's the read, and the read is why you're reading this.

"If I don't, they'll think I'm arrogant"

The fear that stops most people is a picture. You come through the doorway without the sorry, or open the email without it, or say the thing in the meeting without the "can I just", and the room registers a person who thinks a lot of themselves. Arrogant. Entitled. The one who doesn't say sorry.

Kenneth Savitsky and colleagues, in 2001, studied how people expect to be judged after small social slips compared with how observers actually judge them, and found the gap consistent and large. People expected far harsher verdicts on their own conduct than anyone gave. An earlier book in this series uses this finding for the fear of saying no, and it applies here with the same force. The arrogance you picture is the forecast from inside the moment, and forecasts from inside the moment run harsh.

Consider what people actually think when you say "thanks for waiting" instead of "sorry I'm late", or "quick one" instead of "sorry to bother you". In my observation they think nothing at all. The sentence is ordinary. It's what Dev says, and nobody has ever described Dev as arrogant for opening a question with "quick one". They think about the question, because you've given them a question and not an apology to respond to first.

Arrogance is a different thing from not apologising for the rain. Arrogance is not apologising for a fault. It's blaming the brief, walking on in the doorway when you were the one not looking, taking credit for the north report. None of that is what the method asks. What it asks is that you stop confessing to things nobody

accused you of, and the person who does that isn't read as arrogant. They're read as a person who knows the difference between a doorway and a fault, which is to say as an adult.

There's a longer-term version of the fear, that repeated non-apology builds a reputation. Run it the other way. Repeated reflex sorry has built one, and it's the read from chapter 3, and you've been living in it. Whatever the risk of being thought confident, you've been paying the certainty of being thought unsure, every day, in exchange for avoiding it.

"Sorry for asking is just manners"

Some readers will defend the softener as a matter of form. You're asking someone to do something for you. Manners require an acknowledgement. Sorry is the acknowledgement.

Peter Kim and colleagues, in 2004, studied when apologies repair trust and when they don't. They distinguished two kinds of violation. Competence violations, where someone got something wrong, and integrity violations, where someone was dishonest or acted in bad faith. Apologising worked for competence violations. For integrity violations, when the person was innocent, denying it worked better than apologising, because an apology for something you didn't do reads as an admission. The study is about workplaces and alleged wrongdoing, and I'm using it for one narrow point. An apology is understood by the listener as an admission of something. It implies a violation, and the listener looks for one.

Asking a colleague a question isn't a violation of anything. It isn't a competence lapse and it isn't a matter of integrity. It's the ordinary traffic of a workplace. When you open it with sorry, you've told the listener there's a violation somewhere in what follows, and they look for it, and the only candidate is the question itself. So the question gets filed as the violation. The colleague, who'd have answered "when's the deadline?" without a thought, now answers a person who's confessed to intruding, and part of them agrees.

Manners do require an acknowledgement, and there's a word for it that isn't an admission. It's thank you. "Thanks, that's really helpful" acknowledges the colleague's time after the fact, when

there's something to acknowledge, and it costs no competence at all, because thanking, in Chaudhry and Loewenstein's account, is the one of the four that gives credit to the other person without taking blame onto you. That's the thanks swap, and chapter 21 is about it. Sorry before, thanks after, become thanks after and nothing before, and the manners are intact.

"Sorry for asking" isn't manners. It's a confession to a crime that hasn't been committed, offered to a person who wasn't going to charge you, and the confession is what puts the idea in their head.

"I'm sorry you're upset"

There's a sorry for other people's feelings. A friend is having a bad day and you say sorry. A colleague is stressed about a deadline you had nothing to do with and you say sorry. Your partner is cross about something at work and you say sorry, and they say "it's not your fault", and you say sorry for that.

Look at what the sentence does. "I'm sorry you're upset" takes a feeling that arose in someone else, for reasons that are theirs, and places it in the frame of your responsibility. You've said sorry, so there must be something to be sorry for, so their upset must in some way trace back to you. You didn't mean that. But the word means it, and the listener hears it, and one of two things happens.

Either they correct you. "It's not your fault." And now they're managing your apology in the middle of their bad day, which is one more thing on it, and they've learned that telling you about a bad day produces an apology to be dealt with.

Or they don't correct you, and over time they come to feel, in a way neither of you would put into words, that their moods are somehow your department. That when they're upset, you'll say sorry, and the saying sorry means you've taken it on, and they can lean. That's not kindness. It's a slow transfer of responsibility for another adult's feelings onto you, one sorry at a time, and it's heavy, and it was never yours to carry.

There's a sentence that does what you meant. "That sounds rough." "What a day." "Do you want to tell me about it?" Those say I've noticed and I mind, which is what the weather sorry was trying to say, and none of them takes the blame. Brooks's finding in chapter 5 was that the trust came from empathic concern, and empathic concern doesn't need the word sorry to travel. It needs you to have noticed and to say so, and "that sounds rough" is noticing said aloud.

So the sorry for their feelings can go, and the noticing can stay, and the friend with the bad day gets a person who's listening instead of a person who's apologising for the weather in someone else's head.

"If I don't apologise first, they'll be angry"

Some of the reflex is defensive. You get the sorry in before the other person can be cross. The doorway sorry pre-empts the look. The email sorry pre-empts the irritation at being asked. The "sorry, can I just" in the meeting pre-empts the sense that you've taken the floor. The sorry is armour, and taking it off leaves you exposed to reactions you'd rather not have.

Look at what the pre-emptive sorry assumes. It assumes the other person was about to be angry. In the doorway, at the question, at the meeting contribution. Were they? In my observation, and this is the part that surprises people who try the method, the anger you're pre-empting almost never arrives, because it was never coming. The colleague wasn't going to be irritated by a question that's their job to answer. The room wasn't going to resent a contribution to a meeting that exists for contributions. The person in the doorway walked into you. The armour has been worn against an attack that was, on nearly every occasion, not going to happen, and the wearing of it has cost the trade from chapter 3 every time.

Kim and colleagues' finding from chapter 11 has a bearing here too. An apology tells the listener there's been a violation. So the pre-emptive sorry doesn't just fail to prevent anger. It suggests to the listener that there's something to be angry about, where a moment ago there wasn't. You've handed them a grievance, wrapped in an apology for it, and some people, handed a grievance, take it.

There's a version of this that's real and I want to name it. If you live or work with someone whose anger is quick and frightening, and the sorry is how you keep it from arriving, then the sorry is doing a job, and the job matters, and this book isn't the book for it. The preface said so. Nobody should take off armour they need. But most readers of this book aren't wearing it against a real threat. They're wearing it against a forecast, and the forecast is Savitsky's from chapter 10, which runs harsh, and the doorway was never going to hit back.

Try it once in a safe place. Ask a colleague you like a question with "quick one" instead of "sorry to bother you", and watch their face. Nothing will happen. That nothing is the anger that wasn't coming, and once you've seen it not come a dozen times, the armour starts to feel like what it is, which is weight.

"It's how I was raised"

A lot of readers will recognise the reflex from a house. Sorry was the safe word. Said early, said often, it turned away trouble before trouble arrived. A child who said sorry before being asked was a child who got less of whatever came next, and you learned it, and it worked, and here you are at forty in a doorway.

I'd separate what the house taught from whether it's still true. The house taught that you were, by default, likely to be in the wrong, and that the way to survive being in the wrong was to get the apology in first. That may have been accurate in that house. In some houses a child is in the wrong by default and sorry is a real strategy. But you've left the house, and the doorway at work isn't your father, and the colleague isn't going to do anything if you ask a question without a sorry in front of it, and the threshold you're running is the one that was set for a room you don't live in.

The NHS, in its guidance on low self-esteem, says that it often begins in childhood, with messages from teachers, friends, siblings and parents, and that for some reason the message that you're not good enough is the one that stays. The reflex sorry is that message, said aloud, in your own voice, forty times a day. Not because you believe it in so many words. Because a habit formed under it keeps saying it after the belief has gone.

The house isn't destiny. A threshold learned in one place can be reset in another, and the resetting is the method, which is to look at each sorry and ask whether there was a fault, and to discover, forty times a day, that there wasn't. Each discovery is a small

correction to the house's message, and the corrections add up. The NHS's own suggestion for low self-esteem is to note the negative thoughts and write evidence that challenges them. The day's list from chapter 1, with its nearly empty second column, is that evidence, and you're writing it already.

Nothing here requires you to think badly of whoever raised you. They were raised somewhere too. You can be the place where the threshold moves.

"It's a woman thing"

Some readers will have a ready explanation for the habit, and it's that women apologise more and they're a woman and there's nothing to be done about a fact like that.

Go back to Schumann and Ross in chapter 4, because the study was designed to test exactly this, and what it found is more precise than the stereotype and more useful. Women in the diary study did apologise more. They also recorded committing more offences, and the proportion of offences that got an apology was the same for men and women. Nobody was apologising more readily. Women were counting more of what they did as an offence, and men were rating the same behaviours as less severe. The difference was in the threshold, not in the willingness to say sorry once the threshold was crossed.

I want to be careful here, because the book has made no other claim about gender and won't. The study is one study, of a few hundred people, in one country, and it's about diaries and hypothetical offences rather than doorways. What I take from it is narrow. If there is a difference, the research locates it in the threshold, in what gets counted as a fault, and the threshold is a judgement and judgements move. A person who's been told they apologise because of what they are has been given a reason to think the habit is fixed. The study says it isn't. It says the habit is a count, and the count can be recounted.

So "it's a woman thing" may describe an average and it doesn't describe a fate. Men who count everything as a fault apologise all day too, and there are plenty of them in every office. Women who don't, don't. The method in chapter 20 is a recount, one day's sorries sorted into fault and not, and the recount works on anyone whose threshold has drifted low, whoever they are and whatever they were told they'd be.

And if you want one more reason not to accept the explanation, it's that it's a sorry in disguise. "Sorry, it's a woman thing" is an apology for apologising, and you've apologised enough.

"Stopping would feel rude"

Now the practical fear. You know how the sorry comes out. You come through the doorway, someone walks into you, and the word is out before you've thought. Suppose you catch it. What comes out instead? Silence? A look? The silence feels rude, and the rude silence is worse than the reflex.

Two things. The first is that there's a pause, and the pause is short, and it fills. When you catch the sorry in the doorway, what's left is about half a second, and half a second in a doorway is nothing. The other person, who walked into you, says sorry, because they were at fault and most people apologise when they are, and you say "no problem", and the doorway is over. What felt like it would be a rude silence was the space in which the other person's sorry arrived, and your reflex had been filling it for years so that they never had to.

The second is that the pause has sentences for it, and chapter 21 lists them. "Excuse me" for the doorway. "Quick one" for the question. "Thanks for waiting" for the lateness. "After you" for the queue. None of these is rude and all of them are what most people say, and the reason they feel rude to you is that you've been saying sorry in their place for so long that anything else sounds like an omission. It isn't. It's the ordinary sentence, and the sorry was the odd one.

The flinch is physical, and it's worth knowing that. When you catch a sorry, there's a small bodily lurch, a sense of having stepped off a kerb that wasn't there. That's the reflex being interrupted, and it

feels like a mistake because the reflex is old and the interruption is new. It isn't a mistake. It's the half-second, felt from inside, and it gets shorter every time it's allowed to happen.

Expect the first week to feel strange. You'll catch a sorry, leave the half-second, and feel that something's been left undone. Nothing has. The other person didn't notice. In my observation the strangeness lasts about ten days and then the replacement sentences arrive on their own, and the doorway becomes a doorway.

There's one place where the pause is genuinely uncomfortable, and it's when you've caught a sorry that was owed. You were the one not looking. Then say it, once, and mean it, and that's chapter 22. Stopping the reflex doesn't mean stopping the real one. It means the real one gets the half-second, instead of losing it to a word that was already out.

"I only do it at work"

Some readers will say the reflex is a work thing. At home they're fine. It's the office where the sorries come out, and the office is where it matters least, because it's just how offices talk.

I'd turn that round. The office is where the read costs most, because the office is where the read becomes decisions about you.

Go back to Dev. Same job, same questions, same colleague. Dev says "quick one". You say "sorry to bother you". Over three years the colleague has had two thousand exchanges with each of you, and in one set the asker owned the question and in the other the asker apologised for it. Ask the colleague, or the manager, which of you seems more senior, and they won't be able to say why they think what they think, and they'll think it anyway. That's the trade from chapter 3, compounded, and it's the thing that sits under a promotion conversation without ever being named in it.

The meeting is where it shows most. "Sorry, can I just" at the start of every contribution is a request for permission to speak, made to a room that hadn't thought you needed it, and after enough of them the room does think so. Ideas that arrive apologising for themselves get weighed as apologies first and ideas second, and the same idea from someone who said "I think there's a problem with the north figures" without a preamble gets weighed as an idea. You've watched this happen and put it down to Dev being more confident. Dev isn't more confident. Dev just doesn't say sorry before saying things.

The email is where it's most visible, because it's written down. Go and look at your sent folder. Count the ones that open with sorry. Then look at the replies you got, and notice how many treated the request as optional. The softener in writing is a softener the reader can look at twice, and it does its work twice.

So if you only do it at work, the book is about the one place it costs you most, and the method in chapter 21 is about the sentences that do the work of the sorry without the trade, and they're the sentences Dev has been using all along.

What the reflex costs you

I've argued the mechanism. This chapter is the bill, and most of it is paid without your seeing it leave.

The read. Warm, junior, unsure, the one who'll take the blame. Built out of forty trades a day, none of them large, all of them in the same direction, over years, by everyone you work with.

The real sorry, devalued. Chapter 8. When you've done wrong, the word you reach for has been spent on doorways, and the people you've wronged hear the doorway in it.

The questions framed as intrusions. Every softener turns a request into a favour, and favours get declined, and you've concluded that people don't help you, when the truth is that you've been asking in a form that makes helping optional.

The self-esteem. The NHS says that avoiding challenges reinforces the underlying doubts and teaches the unhelpful rule that the only way to cope is by avoiding. The reflex sorry is a small avoidance, of a confrontation that wasn't going to happen, forty times a day, and each one confirms the doubt it was meant to protect you from. An earlier book in this series is about talking to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend, and the reflex sorry is that habit said aloud to other people.

The tiredness. Apologising is work. Scanning every interaction for the offence you might be about to commit, and getting the sorry in first, is a form of vigilance, and vigilance all day is exhausting in a way that doesn't have a name.

The relationships. People who love you have learned to manage your apologies. "It's not your fault" has become something they say several times a week, and it's a small tax, and they pay it, and they'd rather not.

The forty small decisions a day, made by a reflex and not by you, about how you'll present yourself to the people you work and live with. That's not a cost in the usual sense. It's a matter of who's in charge of your own manner, and for years it's been the doorway.

And the things you don't say, because they'd have to arrive apologising, and the apology would take the room's attention before the thing could. Ideas, objections, requests. A great deal of what you've had to say has been said, if at all, as "sorry, but", and "sorry, but" is a sentence people stop listening to at the comma.

What it teaches people about you

The subtitle of this book promises to say what the sorries teach people, and this is the chapter. Nobody sets out to learn these things about you. They learn them the way people learn anything about anyone, from what gets said most.

That you think you're in the way. Forty sorries a day for existing in doorways and asking questions tell everyone around you that you experience your own presence as an imposition, and people take you at your word about that.

That your time matters less than theirs. A person who apologises for asking a colleague to do their job has said that the colleague's minute is worth more than their own need, and the colleague, being human, files it.

That you'll take the blame. The trade in chapter 3 runs in one direction. Every sorry takes blame on. Over years, you become the person in the room who'll absorb whatever's going, and when something goes wrong and nobody knows whose it is, eyes go to the one who's been saying sorry all along.

That your requests are favours. The softener does this, and once a request is a favour it can be refused without cost, and yours are.

That they can lean. A person who apologises for other people's bad days has offered to carry them, and the offer is taken up, quietly, by people who'd never have asked.

That you'll go first. In any disagreement, the reflex apologise concedes before the disagreement has been had, and the people around them learn that they don't have to make a case, because you'll have said sorry before they've finished the sentence.

There's a related habit worth a paragraph, which is saying yes to everything, and an earlier book in this series is about it. The reflex sorry and the unwilling yes come from the same threshold, and they teach the same lesson, which is that you can be relied on to put yourself last, and people do rely on it, and mostly not out of malice. They've just been told, forty times a day, that it's fine.

And the child. A child who watches a parent apologise for existing learns that this is what adults do when they occupy a room, and the child will say sorry in doorways at thirty, and won't know where it came from, and it came from watching you.

None of this is what you intend. You intend courtesy. What arrives is a daily lesson in how little you think you're owed, and people learn it, and act on it, and you experience the acting on it as further evidence that you'd better apologise.

Sort the sorries

The next three chapters are the method. This one is a sorting exercise that takes an evening and does most of the work, because once you've seen the day's sorries in columns you can't unsee them.

Three columns. Take the day's list from chapter 1 and sort each sorry into one of three. Fault, meaning you did something wrong and someone was affected. Softener, meaning the sorry opened a question, a request or a contribution. Weather, meaning it was about something nobody caused, the doorway, the rain, the late food, the cold, someone else's bad day.

Most go in the last two. For most people who do this, the fault column has one or two entries, and the softener and weather columns have the rest. That's the finding. It's your own, from your own day, and it's more persuasive than anything in the research, because it shows you that the threshold is set so low that almost nothing you apologised for was a thing you did.

The fault column is the real sorry. Those are the ones to keep and to make better, and chapter 22 is about how. Don't lose them in the sorting. A person who stops all sorries has thrown out the two that mattered with the thirty-eight that didn't.

The softener column is chapter 21. Each entry there has a replacement sentence, and the replacement does the job of the sorry without the trade.

The weather column is silence. Or "that sounds rough", for other people's weather. Or "excuse me", for doorways. Weather needs no apology, and the sorry for it was the threshold at its lowest.

Sort for three days. Not one. The first day you'll be surprised. The second you'll start catching sorries before they're said, because you know which column they're heading for. The third the columns will have started sorting themselves in the moment, which is the whole aim.

Say the column out loud, once. For the first few days, when a sorry is caught, name where it would have gone. "Softener." "Weather." Not aloud in the meeting, but in your head, as a label. The naming is what turns the sorting from an evening exercise into a thing that happens in the half-second.

Keep the fault column honest. It's tempting, once the exercise is under way, to move things into fault to justify the sorry. Was standing in the doorway a fault? No. Was asking the question? No. Was being late by five minutes? Yes, that one goes in fault, and gets a real sorry, once, without a story, as an earlier book in this series says.

Swap the softener

The softener and the weather sorry have replacement sentences, and they're the sentences most people already use. This chapter is a list, because a list is what you need in the half-second.

"Quick one." For the question at work. Dev's sentence. It says a question is coming and it'll be brief, and it costs nothing.

"Can I ask." For the question where you want to signal a little more. It's a request for attention and not for permission, and the difference is that attention is owed between colleagues and permission isn't.

"Excuse me." For doorways, queues, getting past. It's the ordinary word for occupying space and it carries no blame.

"Thanks for waiting." For lateness, when it's minutes and nobody was harmed. It acknowledges their time, which is what the sorry was trying to do, and it does it in the thanking register, which gives them credit rather than taking blame onto you. If the lateness was a fault, it's chapter 22, and the earlier book in this series on lateness has the full account.

"That sounds rough." For other people's weather. It says you noticed, which is what Brooks found the trust came from, and it doesn't take their day onto your account.

"I think there's a problem with the north figures." For the meeting. Not "sorry, can I just". The thing, said, with your name on it. If it feels abrupt, it's because you've been prefacing for years and

an unprelaced sentence sounds bare. It isn't. It's a sentence.

Nothing. For the doorway when the other person walked into you. Leave the half-second and let them say it.

The thanks swap. Wherever a sorry was doing the work of acknowledgement, thank you does it better. "Sorry for the delay" becomes "thanks for your patience". "Sorry to chase" becomes "just following up". "Sorry, I don't understand" becomes "can you say that again?". In Chaudhry and Loewenstein's account, thanking gives the other person credit without taking blame onto you, and it's the one of the four communications that costs no competence, which makes it the swap that gives the warmth and keeps the standing.

"That's a good point." For the meeting, when someone's said something and you want to add to it. Not "sorry, just to add". The sentence acknowledges them, which is what the sorry was reaching for, and then you add, and the addition arrives as a contribution rather than an intrusion.

"I'd like to." For when you're asked to do something and you're agreeing. Not "sorry, yes, of course". Agreement doesn't need an apology in front of it, and "I'd like to" is agreement with a person in it.

Write three on a card. The three you'll need most. For most people it's "quick one", "thanks for waiting" and "excuse me". Have them where you'll see them for a week, and by the second week they'll arrive on their own.

Keep the real one and make it count

The book has spent a long time on the sorries that weren't owed. This chapter is about the ones that are, because the point of clearing the reflex is that the real sorry can be heard again.

Once. A real sorry is said once. Not repeated through the evening, not brought up again the next day. Repetition is the reflex creeping back into the real one, and it does to the real sorry what it did to the rest, which is wear it through. The earlier book in this series on lateness says sorry once, briefly, no story, and I'd say the same for every fault.

The components that matter. Lewicki's study found that apologies with more components were more effective and that some components mattered more. I'd take three, because three is what fits in a real conversation. Acknowledge what you did. Take responsibility for it. Offer to put it right. "I forgot the report was due today. That's on me. I'll have it to you by four." That's an apology with the three most important parts in it, and no "sorry" in it at all, which is worth noticing. The word is the least of it.

No "but". "I'm sorry, but you didn't remind me" isn't an apology. It's a defence with an apology as its first word, and the listener hears the but and discards everything before it. If there's context, give it afterwards, separately, once the apology has landed and been accepted.

No story. The long account of why it happened is for you, not them. It turns the apology into a request for understanding, and the person you've wronged shouldn't have to give you anything in the moment you're apologising to them.

Mean it, and then stop. A real sorry followed by three more is a person apologising for having had to apologise. Say it, let it land, and let the conversation go where it goes.

In writing, the same. A real apology by text or email has the same three parts and the same once. "I got the date wrong, that's my fault, I've moved the booking and I'll confirm tonight." No sorry in the subject line, no sorry in the first line and again in the last. Written apologies are where the reflex hides best, because you can see the word and it looks polite, and the reader sees five of them and stops reading.

Notice how it lands now. Once the reflex has gone, the real sorry is the only sorry you say, and the people who know you know that. It arrives with weight, because it's rare, and it's received as what it is, because you've stopped teaching people that your sorry means nothing in particular. That's the reward for the whole method. Not fewer apologies for their own sake. A word that works when you need it.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to fit in one sentence.

I say sorry when I've done something wrong, fully and once, and for everything else I say what I mean.

Three parts.

The first is the sort. Fault, softener, weather. Three days of columns, until the sorting happens in the half-second.

The second is the swap. Quick one, excuse me, thanks for waiting, that sounds rough, the thing itself. Three sentences on a card.

The third is the real one. Acknowledge, take responsibility, offer repair. Once. No but, no story.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When I'm about to ask a colleague a question, I'll say "quick one" and then the question.

When I catch "sorry" arriving for something nobody did, I'll leave the half-second and say nothing or "excuse me".

When I've done something wrong, I'll say what I did, that it's mine, and how I'll put it right, once.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first two days the sorry will be out before you've caught it, and you'll notice after, and the noticing after is the beginning. By the end of the first week you'll be catching about half, and the half-seconds will feel strange, and the other person won't have noticed anything. Around the second week "quick one" will arrive on its own in an email, and you'll reread it and it'll look like Dev's. In the third week someone who's known you for years will say "you've stopped apologising all the time", and it'll be said with something like relief, because they'd been paying the tax in chapter 18. By a month you'll have said one real sorry, for a real fault, and it'll have landed in a way that your sorries haven't landed in years, and the person will have said "thank you" back, which is what a real apology gets. The day's sorries will be under five. And you'll notice, in a meeting, that you said the thing about the north figures without a preamble, and that the room weighed it as a thing.

Emails, meetings, restaurants, crowds, partners and when it's more than a habit

The rule holds everywhere. A few places need their own paragraph.

Emails. The written softener is the one you can go back and delete before sending, and for a fortnight, do. Draft the email as it comes, then remove every sorry that isn't for a fault, and read it again. It'll read like a competent person's email. Then send it. After a fortnight you'll stop drafting them in.

Meetings. The thing, with your name on it, no preamble. If you want a run-up, "one thing on the north figures" is a run-up that isn't an apology. And when you've been talked over, which happens more to people who apologise for speaking, "I hadn't finished" is the sentence, pleasantly, and an earlier book in this series is about the other side of that.

Restaurants and shops. The waiter brought the wrong thing. "This isn't what I ordered" is a sentence with no fault in it on either side. The sorry for pointing it out teaches the waiter that you'll accept whatever comes, and some do learn that. Say what's wrong, kindly, and thank them when it's fixed.

Crowds and doorways. "Excuse me" for getting past, silence for being walked into, "after you" for the queue. The British sorry in a crowd is mostly a signal that you've noticed the other person, and "excuse me" is the same signal without the confession.

Partners. The reflex sorry at home is the one that's hardest to see and does the quietest damage, because a partner who hears sorry forty times a day from you learns the lessons in chapter 19 more thoroughly than anyone. The sort works at home too. So does the swap. And the real sorry at home, said once and fully, is the most valuable one you'll ever say, and it's worth saving the word for.

Children. Two things. Don't apologise to your child for asking them to do things. "Sorry, could you tidy your room" is a request with an exit, and they'll take it. And do apologise to them, fully, when you've done wrong, because a child who sees a real apology learns what one is, and a child who hears forty reflex ones a day learns what chapter 19 says.

When it's more than a habit. If the sorry comes from fear of the person you live with, if you apologise to keep the peace because the peace isn't safe, that isn't a threshold and this book isn't the answer. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is on 0808 2000 247. And if the sense of being in the way is the surface of a low mood that's been with you most days for a fortnight, or of a self-esteem so low that the NHS's description of it fits you, a GP is the door, and the NHS guidance on raising low self-esteem is worth reading alongside this book, because its method, noting the negative belief and writing the evidence against it, is close to the sort in chapter 20.

When you've said sorry twelve times before lunch

It'll happen. A tired morning, a difficult colleague, a meeting that went badly, and by lunch you'll have said sorry twelve times and counted them, and the counting will feel like failure.

Twelve isn't forty. Last month it was forty by lunch and you weren't counting. What's happened is that the threshold is old and the sort is new, and on a morning with pressure in it the old one gets a run. It doesn't mean the habit's back. It means it's a habit, and habits come round.

Sort them late. At lunch, put the twelve into columns. In my experience the fault column still has one or two in it and the rest are softeners and weather, and seeing that at lunch does what seeing it at bedtime did on the first day. The columns are the correction, and they work at any hour.

Work out which softener got through. Was it the email opener, because you were writing fast? Then a fortnight of deleting before sending. Was it the meeting, because the room was tense? Then the one-thing run-up on the card. Was it a particular person you always apologise to? Then that person gets "quick one" from tomorrow, and you'll notice it feels hardest with them, and that's information about the read you've built with them, and it moves.

And notice the size of it. Twelve reflex sorries is twelve small trades. Last month it was forty a day and you didn't know they were trades. The habit hasn't returned. It came round on a hard

morning, found the old threshold, and used it, and the threshold moves back by lunch with the columns.

No streaks. Don't count sorry-free days. Count the fault column, and let a twelve-sorry morning be a morning with two real ones in it and ten that you noticed. Noticing ten is not what you were doing last month.

Thanks for waiting

You're in the doorway at work, some months on, and someone comes through the other way and walks into you. There's half a second. "Sorry," they say, because they weren't looking. "No problem," you say, and go through. At your desk the first email of the day opens "Quick one, when's the north report due?" and the answer comes back in four minutes, because the question had no exits in it. In the meeting you say "I think there's a problem with the north figures", and the room looks at the figures, and there is.

At lunch the food's slow, and when it comes it's the wrong thing, and you say "this isn't what I ordered", pleasantly, and it's fixed, and you say thanks. You've got a cold and you cough and don't say anything about it, because it's a cold. Dev, at the next desk, says "quick one", and you notice that you've stopped noticing Dev.

There was a real one, in March. You forgot a thing that mattered to a friend and let her down, and you said "I forgot, that's on me, let me make it up to you on Saturday", once, and she said "thank you for saying that", which nobody had said to you after an apology in years, because your apologies had been about doorways, and this one wasn't.

The day's sorries are under five, most days, and the ones there are go in the fault column, and you've stopped keeping the list because there's nothing much to put in it. Your partner said last month that you'd stopped saying sorry all the time, and then said, after a pause, that it was nice not having to say it wasn't your fault, and you understood what they meant, and didn't say sorry for it.

A colleague who joined in the spring asked you last week how you'd got so comfortable speaking in meetings. You told her, more or less, what's in this book, and she looked doubtful, and the next morning her email opened "Quick one", and you noticed, and didn't say anything, which is a kind of thanks.

None of this is a transformation. You said sorry to a lamp post on Tuesday. You still open the odd email with it when you're tired and delete it before sending. The threshold is where it should be most of the time, and when it drops, the columns are there, and the card with three sentences on it is in your wallet, though you haven't looked at it in weeks.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. Tomorrow, before your first question at work, say "quick one" and then the question, and notice what comes back. That's the whole method. Everything else is detail.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't psychological advice, and it's no substitute for a GP or a therapist who knows you. The NHS guidance I mention is for England as I found it in September 2026.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 2, 9, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25 and 26. The doorway, the email, the meeting, the restaurant and Dev are invented.

Before you start. The helpline number is from the NHS pages on getting help for domestic abuse. The two-week guide for low mood is from the NHS pages on depression, both as verified for earlier books in this series.

Chapter 3. Chaudhry and Loewenstein, "Thanking, apologizing, bragging, and blaming: responsibility exchange theory and the currency of communication", *Psychological Review* 126, 2019, pages 313 to 344. A theory with two experiments. The extension from the theory to forty sorries a day is mine.

Chapter 4. Schumann and Ross, "Why women apologize more than men: gender differences in thresholds for perceiving offensive behavior", *Psychological Science* 21, 2010, pages 1649 to 1655. A

diary study and a second study with imagined and recalled offences. The chapter uses the mechanism and chapter 15 returns to the gender finding with its limits.

Chapter 5. Brooks, Dai and Schweitzer, "I'm sorry about the rain! Superfluous apologies demonstrate empathic concern and increase trust", *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2013. Four studies, mostly with strangers, which the chapter says. Presented as honest counter-evidence, with the distinction between once and forty times being mine.

Chapter 6. The earlier book on not asking for help is *Could you hold the ladder*. The account of what the softener tells the listener is mine.

Chapter 7. Okimoto, Wenzel and Hedrick, "Refusing to apologize can have psychological benefits (and we issue no mea culpa for this research finding)", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2012. Two studies. Presented as a caution about the opposite habit and not as a recommendation.

Chapter 8. Lewicki, Polin and Lount, "An exploration of the structure of effective apologies", *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 9, 2016. Two studies with scenarios. The six components are theirs. The claim that the reflex sorry devalues the real one is mine.

Chapter 10. Savitsky, Epley and Gilovich, "Do others judge us as harshly as we think? Overestimating the impact of our failures on others' judgments", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*

81, 2001, pages 44 to 56, as verified for the earlier book Say no. What people think of "thanks for waiting" is my observation.

Chapter 11. Kim, Ferrin, Cooper and Dirks, "Removing the shadow of suspicion: the effects of apology versus denial for repairing competence- versus integrity-based trust violations", Journal of Applied Psychology 89, 2004, pages 104 to 118. Workplace scenarios. The chapter uses only the point that an apology implies a violation. Chaudhry and Loewenstein as above, for thanking.

Chapter 13. Kim and colleagues, and Savitsky and colleagues, as cited below and above. The observation that the anger rarely arrives is mine.

Chapter 14. The NHS page "Raising low self-esteem", for the origins in childhood messages and the method of noting negative thoughts and writing evidence against them.

Chapter 15. Schumann and Ross as above. The chapter makes no claim about gender beyond that study's finding about thresholds.

Chapter 18. The NHS page as above, for avoidance reinforcing doubt. Chaudhry and Loewenstein as above. The earlier book on self-criticism is You wouldn't say it to a friend. The rest is mine.

Chapter 19. The earlier book on saying yes to everything is Say no. Everything else in the chapter is my reasoning.

Chapter 21. Chaudhry and Loewenstein as above, for thanking as the communication that gives credit without taking blame. Brooks and colleagues as above. The earlier book on lateness is Sorry I'm late.

Chapter 22. Lewicki and colleagues as above. The choice of three components is mine. The earlier book on lateness as above.

Chapter 23. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule hasn't been tested as a package, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 24. The helpline and the NHS pages as above. The earlier book on being interrupted is *Let them finish*.