Keep your kindness and claim your space

How to Stop Apologising for No Reason

Katy Thatcher



Inside

1 What every extra sorry is quietly costing you 4

2 The question to ask in the half-second before you say it 7

3 The Thank-You Underneath 9

4 The Seven-Word Sorry, for when you really did get it wrong 10

5 Why self-hypnosis works so well on a habit like this 12

6 A 12-minute self-hypnosis session to rehearse the new you 14

7 What the people who make it stick do differently 17

8 Six months from now 19

A young woman with $5,000 of savings and one product is sitting across from a buyer at one of the most famous department stores in America, and the meeting is going nowhere.

The buyer doesn't get it. She's polite and she's busy, and you can feel the chance slipping away. Most of us know exactly what we'd say next: "Sorry for taking up your time, I know you're busy."

She stopped the meeting instead.

She asked the buyer to come with her to the bathroom, and there she showed her own before and after in a pair of white trousers.

The buyer said, "Oh, I get it! It's brilliant. I'll take it in seven stores."

That woman was Sara Blakely, and the product was Spanx.

She didn't wait for anyone to approve her next step either, so she bought envelope dividers and put her product beside every register in the store.

A few months later one TV mention brought in 20,000 orders in a day, and years after that she sold a majority stake in a company valued at $1.2 billion.

I love that moment because she didn't turn into a harder person in that room.

She stayed warm, she just didn't apologise for being there, and she asked for what she came for.

Now think about your own rooms. The meeting where you start with "Sorry, quick question."

The text to a friend that has three sorrys in it before you get to the point.

The pay rise you still haven't asked for, and the evening you spend replaying everything you wish you'd said.

I wrote this for the woman who is kind, capable and completely done with shrinking herself.

If you've ever said sorry to someone who bumped into you, you're in the right place, and you're closer to the confident version of you than you think.

Here's what I believe.

I believe "just stop saying sorry" is some of the worst advice you've ever been given, because it treats your kindness like a fault when your kindness is one of your strengths.

I believe you don't need to dig up where this habit started before you can change it.

And I believe self-hypnosis is one of the fastest ways to make a new habit feel like the real you, because it trains your body and mind together.

The results back that up. Across 17 controlled trials, hypnosis brought anxiety down by a large amount.

In an app used by more than 84,000 people, a single 11 to 13 minute guided session cut stress by about two points out of ten.

And when people apologise sincerely, research shows they come across as warmer and more capable, however often they do it.

In the next few pages you'll find:

- • The one question that stops an empty sorry in the half-second before it leaves your mouth
- • What to say instead, so people feel thanked and you come across as more capable
- • How to give a real apology that people respect, in about seven words
- • Why the anxious wave you feel when you hold back a sorry is a sign you're winning
- • A 12-minute self-hypnosis session that rehearses the new you until it feels normal
- • The small extras the people who make this stick always add

You don’t need to fix every sorry at once. Start with one question you ask yourself, and one short session before bed.

By the end you’ll know exactly what to say in the moments that used to shrink you, and how to make saying it feel easy.

Let’s get you asking for the order.



What every extra sorry is quietly costing you

Over-apologising feels like good manners, and part of it is.

You care about people, you don’t want to be a bother, and you’d rather smooth things over than cause a fuss.

That kindness is worth keeping, but it helps to see what the automatic sorry does to how people see you, and to how you see yourself.

Researchers asked about 300 people in relationships how they saw their partner's apologies.

When the apologies were sincere and clear, saying sorry often made people seem warmer.

Only the frequent, automatic sorrys with no real reason behind them made people seem **less competent and less confident**.

So a real apology is always worth giving, and it's the reflex sorry that slowly shrinks you.

It costs the people around you too.

One of the best-known clinicians on apologies once counted five sorrys from a friend before the waiter had even brought the appetisers.

Every one of those sorrys forces the other person to say "No, not at all, it's fine," when they could be talking about what you both came to talk about.

There's a cost inside you as well.

Each sorry quietly asks the other person to tell you it's fine, and that brings a moment of relief, so your brain learns to do it again next time.

One specialist compares reassurance to a drug you build a tolerance to, where tomorrow you need all of today's reassurance plus a little more.

Researchers who pulled together 38 studies found that people who needed a lot of reassurance were also more likely to feel depressed.

That's how a habit of politeness slowly turns into a habit of doubting yourself.

Research into why women apologise more than men found something most advice misses.

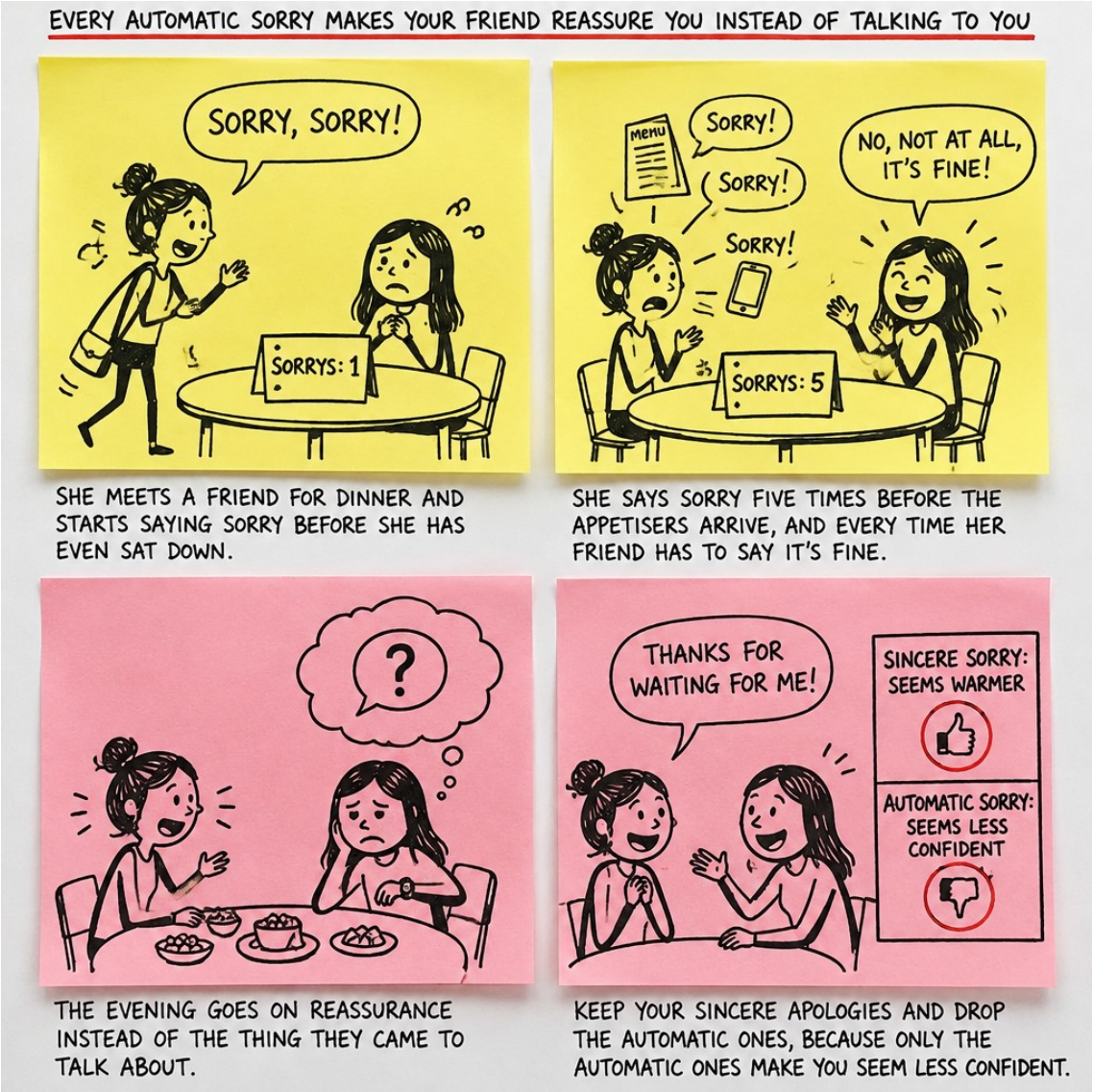
Men have a higher bar for what counts as doing something wrong, so the difference shows up at the moment a person decides whether anything bad happened at all.

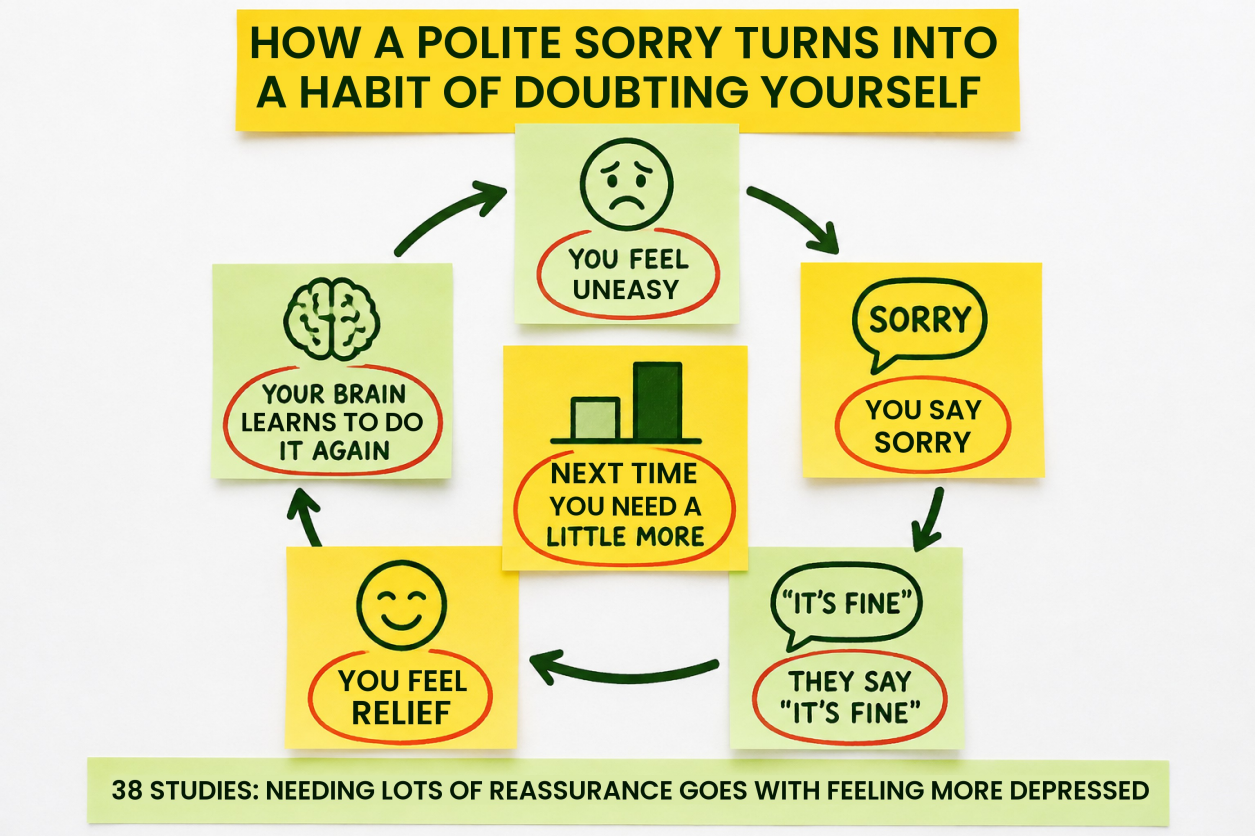
Swapping your words is a great start, and it sticks best when you also change **what you count as your fault**.

It even reaches the body.

In a study of 290 women in midlife, the ones who silenced their own needs more had more plaque in the arteries of their neck, even after allowing for things like age, blood pressure and diet.

Speaking up for yourself is good for far more than your career.





The question to ask in the half-second before you say it

The moment to change this is tiny.

It's the half-second between feeling the urge and the word leaving your mouth, and in that gap you ask yourself one question.

> **Ask this:** "Did I actually do something wrong, or am I just uncomfortable right now?"

Most of the time the answer is that you're uncomfortable. Someone bumped into you, a friend was kept waiting, or you need something from someone.

Discomfort is a feeling, and it isn't the same thing as fault.

Even just noticing helps.

Saying to yourself “I feel the urge to apologise right now” takes about two seconds, and it turns an automatic habit into a choice you get to make.

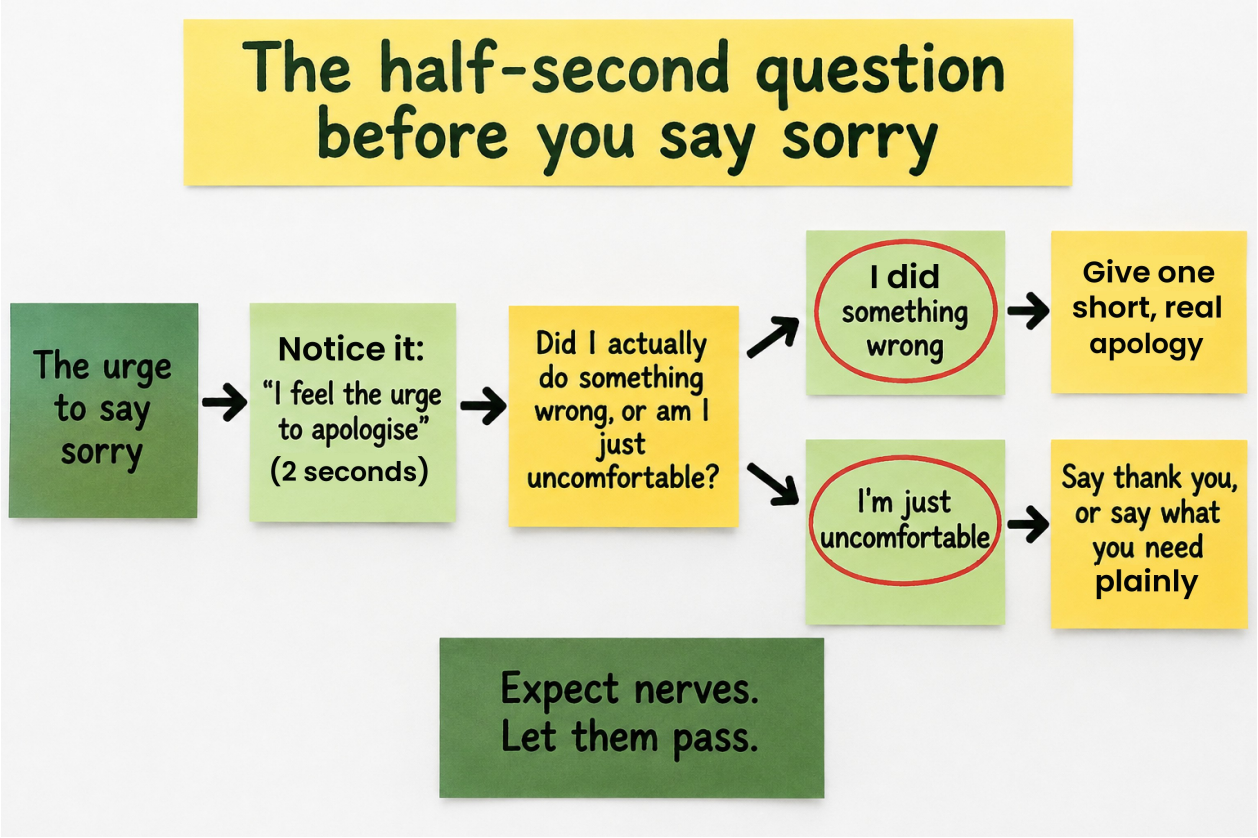
When you hold a sorry back, expect a wave of nerves. That feeling is exactly what the sorry used to soothe, so when it shows up it means you’re doing it right. Let it rise, and let it pass on its own.

The other half is having your words ready before you need them.

In a study of 535 people, around eight in ten handed their unlocked phone to a stranger even after being told they could refuse.

Being told they were free to say no barely changed that, while being handed the exact words to say helped more.

Permission on its own isn’t enough, so the next two techniques give you the sentences to carry with you.



The Thank-You Underneath

Most sorrys have something else hiding under them. **The Thank-You Underneath** is the habit of looking for it before you speak.

When a sorry rises and there's a thank-you underneath, you say the thank-you instead.

- "Sorry I'm late" becomes "Thanks for waiting."
- "Sorry for the slow reply" becomes "Thank you for your patience."
- "Sorry, I'm rambling" becomes "Thanks for letting me think out loud."
- "Sorry, this place is a mess" becomes "Thanks for coming over."

Sometimes there's no thank-you under the sorry at all, only a need or an opinion.

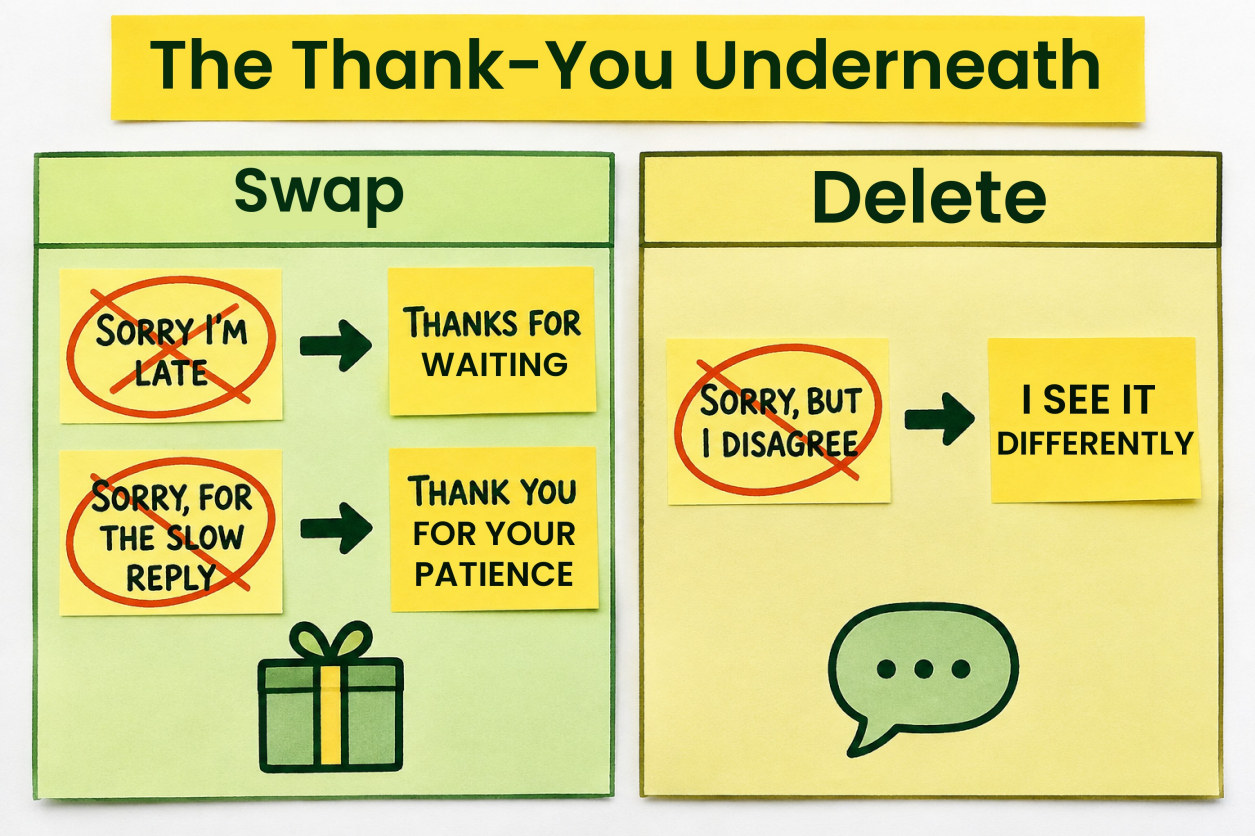
Then you delete the sorry and say the rest plainly.

"Sorry, but I disagree" becomes "I see it differently," and "Sorry, that doesn't work for me" becomes "That doesn't work for me."

It works because a sorry hands the listener a small bill. They now have a problem to settle, so they have to reassure you.

A thank-you hands them a gift instead, because it tells them they helped.

People walk away feeling good about you, and you come across as someone in charge of herself.



Swap when a thank-you is hiding under the sorry, and delete the sorry when all that's under it is your need or your opinion.

The one slip to watch for is putting a thank-you where a need belongs.

If someone talks over you, "Thanks for your input" lets them keep going.

Say what you need instead, warmly: "Oops, I don't think you realised, I hadn't finished my point yet."

The Seven-Word Sorry, for when you really did get it wrong

Dropping the empty sorrys is half of it, and the other half is giving a strong apology when you've truly made a mistake. People always rate a missing apology badly, so the goal is to make the one you give count.

The Seven-Word Sorry is how you give it. You apologise once, for what you did rather than for how they feel, with no “but”, and you keep it short: “I told that joke. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.” Then you change the behaviour, because an apology means nothing if the thing keeps happening.

Compare “I’m sorry the joke upset you” with “I’m sorry I told that joke.”

The first one puts the problem on their feelings, and the second one owns what you did.

Leave out the “but” too, because “I’m sorry, but you were late as well” cancels everything before it.

The short part matters more than most of us expect.

The leading clinician on apologies learnt it from interviewing hundreds of children, who told her that when an apology goes on and on, the other person stops listening.

And the study of 300 couples found that clear, sincere apologies made people seem more capable however often they gave them. When you stop spending sorrys on nothing, The Seven-Word Sorry carries its full weight.

For a big hurt that hasn’t healed, give your apology and then keep listening, because an apology should never be a quick way out of a hard conversation.

A good check is to ask whether your sorry is owning something you did, or just calming your own nerves.



Why self-hypnosis works so well on a habit like this

Knowing the words is one thing, and saying them while your heart is pounding is another. That's where self-hypnosis comes in.

Self-hypnosis is a deeply relaxed, focused state you guide yourself into, where you calm your body and rehearse a new way of acting until it feels normal.

If you over-apologise, you're already running a kind of self-hypnosis all day long.

"I'm such an idiot, sorry, sorry" is a script, and you've repeated it so often it plays by itself.

A session gives your mind a better script to repeat.

The research behind it is strong. When researchers combined 17 controlled trials, hypnosis brought anxiety down by a large amount, and among about 700 hypnosis professionals, **building confidence** was rated one of its most effective uses, alongside easing stress and anxiety.

It also works for ordinary people listening at home.

In a study of more than 84,000 people using a hypnosis app, stress dropped after each session.

The longer, guided sessions of 11 to 13 minutes cut stress nearly twice as much as short ones of about five minutes.

And you don't need to be someone who goes under easily, because people of every level benefited.

One well-known news presenter had been scared of planes for decades and took medication just to fly.

After one guided session on camera with a Stanford psychiatrist, picturing the plane door closing, he described himself as "0 to 1… not anxious."

A few calm minutes can change how a frightening moment feels, and your frightening moments are much smaller than a plane door.



A quiet chair and a few calm minutes before bed are all the set-up you need.

A 12-minute self-hypnosis session to rehearse the new you

These steps follow the order a Stanford psychiatrist teaches his patients, calming the body first and the worry second.

For this habit, you also rehearse the exact sentence you want to say.

1. Sit or lie somewhere quiet and choose the moment you're practising tonight, such as saying "That doesn't work for me" to your manager.

2. Look up as high as you can, then slowly close your eyes while you're still looking up.
3. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly through your mouth. Let your eyes relax and imagine your body floating, as if you're in a warm bath or on a calm lake.
4. Stay with your body first. Let your jaw, shoulders and hands go heavy, because your body is the one thing you control right now, and a calm body tells your mind there's no danger.
5. Picture a calm place with every sense: the sounds, the warmth on your skin, the smell of the air.
6. Now float into the real scene. See your colleague talking over you or the waiter bringing the wrong order, and hear yourself say your sentence calmly. Talk yourself through it by your own name: "All right, Katy, here's what you say."
7. While you picture it going well, say a line to yourself with real feeling, such as "I'm the kind of woman who says what she needs" or "I'm getting better at taking up my space every day."
8. Come back by counting three, two, one. On three, get ready. On two, roll your eyes up. On one, open them, let your hands float down, make a fist, then open it.



Your body calms down first, and only then do you step into the moment you're practising.

What the people who make it stick do differently

Michael Phelps learnt the order of this as a boy.

His coach gave his mother a relaxation book to read to him at bedtime, and he got so practised that she only had to read a couple of lines before he was asleep.

Relaxation came first, and then the pictures.

From about the age of 13 he rehearsed what he wanted to happen in a race and what he didn’t, starting a month or so ahead, so when something went wrong he was ready for it.

For you that means calming your body before you picture anything, and rehearsing the actual sentence you’ll say as well as the feeling of confidence.

The best also talk to themselves by name.

In a brain-scan study of 50 people thinking about bad memories, using their own name instead of “I” made the memories feel noticeably less upsetting, and it took no extra effort.

Your name gives you a little distance, the way a good friend’s advice does.

They anchor themselves in what they already value.

Before a stressful moment, spend two minutes writing a few lines about the value that matters most to you, such as your family, your honesty or your creativity.

In a study of 73 students, the most stressed ones who did this before a test performed as well as the calm ones, so it’s a lovely thing to do before a big meeting.

They practise when the stakes are low.

One sleep psychologist points out that you're at your weakest in the moment of stress, so the skill has to be built earlier, in a calm few minutes during the day.

Try the pause on the stranger who bumps into you at the shops before you try it in front of your boss.

And they give it time. Over half the people in that huge app study only ever did one session, which is like judging a gym by one visit.

One listener who used the same self-hypnosis track every day said she "stuck to the same track for 21 days and my anxiety and sleep issues really improved dramatically."

Ten to fifteen minutes once or twice a day is plenty. If the first session feels light, that's normal.

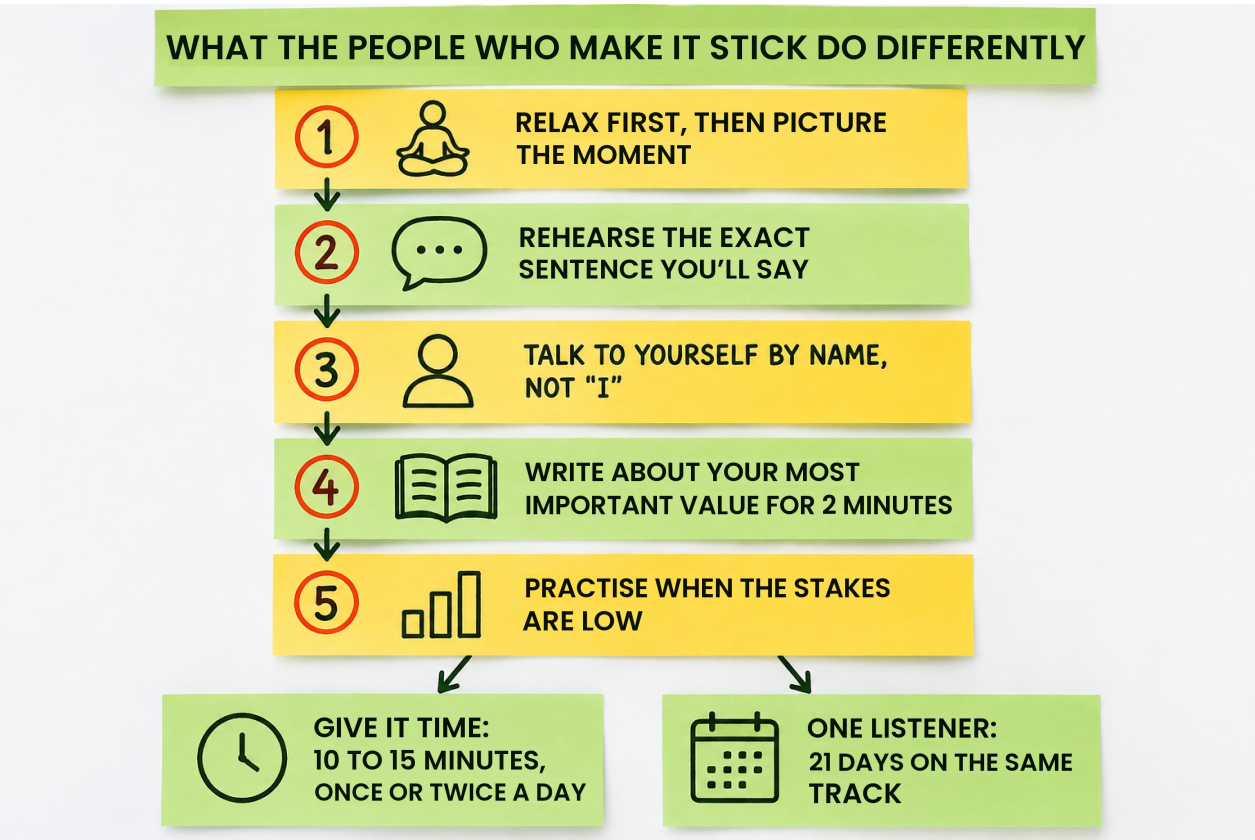
Trying too hard to feel something dramatic is usually what holds it back, so just relax and let it happen.

> **One thing to check first:** if you have schizophrenia, a dissociative disorder, seizures or another neurological condition, PTSD, a recent major trauma, or you're in extreme distress, talk to a professional before you start self-hypnosis. The same goes if the need to ask for reassurance feels impossible to resist every day, because that deserves proper support alongside anything you do at home.

How to start

1. Tomorrow, ask the half-second question every time you feel a sorry rising, and swap in one thank-you before lunch.
2. Tomorrow night, do your first 12-minute session and rehearse one sentence you'll need this week.
3. Keep the same session going every night for 21 days.
4. You'll know it's working when a sorry catches in your throat and you say the thank-you instead without having to think about it.

> **I got my start by giving myself a start.**
>
> Madam C. J. Walker, credited as America’s first self-made woman millionaire



Six months from now

Picture yourself half a year ahead. You walk into the meeting and open with your point.

A friend is kept waiting and you thank her, and she smiles.

When you do make a mistake, you own it in seven words and everyone moves on, because your sorry means something now.

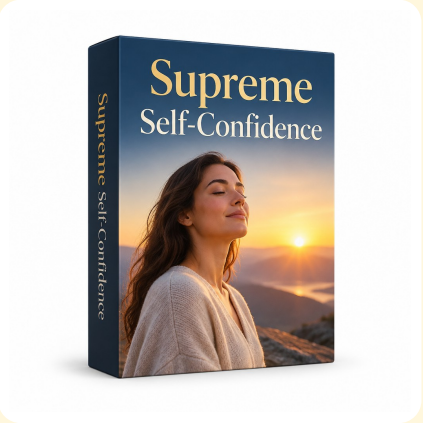
You’re still the kindest person in the room. You’ve just stopped paying for it with your confidence.

Sara Blakely didn’t apologise for interrupting that meeting. She stood up and showed the buyer what she had.

Your next meeting is coming, so let’s get you ready to ask for the order.



Let ten quiet minutes a day do the work that saying sorry never could



You know the order now: calm your body first, then picture the moment and say the sentence. Doing that alone every day is hard.

Supreme Self-Confidence is a set of self-hypnosis tracks that guide you through it, so you just press play and relax.

- The tracks are built on broad human psychology and on methods people have used for thousands of years, so you're leaning on what has worked for a very long time.
- There's more than one track, so you can pick the one that suits the day, the way one listener did when her anxiety and sleep needed different help.
- You can stay with the same track for weeks, which is how real change builds after that first session that feels light.
- It works whether you're 21 or 61, because it's never too early or too late to stop shrinking and start asking for what you want.

You can play your first track tonight in bed, which is exactly where Michael Phelps did his practice.

Get the confidence tracks

I may earn a commission if you buy through this link, at no extra cost to you.

Sources

1. Ramondo, Gignac, Pestell & Byrne, 2019. Hypnosis for anxiety. International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 67(3):336–363. Meta-analysis of 17 controlled trials.
2. Tran et al., 2025. Effects of app-delivered self-hypnosis on stress management. npj Digital Medicine. 84,395 app users across 282,893 stress sessions.
   nature.com/articles/s41746-025-02182-0
3. Schumann, Ritchie & Forest, 2023. The social consequences of frequent versus infrequent apologizing. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 49(3):331–343. 300 people in relationships.
   journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/01461672211065286
4. Starr & Davila, 2008. Excessive reassurance seeking, depression and interpersonal rejection: a meta-analytic review. Journal of Abnormal Psychology. Meta-analysis of 38 studies, 6,973 people.
   pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19025224/
5. Schumann & Ross, 2010. Why women apologize more than men. Psychological Science.
   journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797610384150
6. Jakubowski et al., 2021. The cardiovascular cost of silence: self-silencing and carotid atherosclerosis in midlife women. Annals of Behavioral Medicine. 290 non-smoking women aged 40–60.
   pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8887577/
7. Schlund, Sommers & Bohns, 2024. Giving people the words to say no leads them to feel freer to say yes. Scientific Reports. 535 people.
   nature.com/articles/s41598-023-50532-3
8. Palsson, 2023. Survey of hypnosis practitioners' ratings of applications. About 700 hypnosis practitioners.
9. Moser et al., 2017. Third-person self-talk facilitates emotion regulation without engaging cognitive control. Scientific Reports. 50 participants recalling negative memories.
   nature.com/articles/s41598-017-04047-3
10. Creswell et al., 2013. Self-affirmation improves problem-solving under stress. PLoS One. 73 students.
    journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0062593
11. Halldorsson & Salkovskis, 2017. Why do people with OCD and health anxiety seek reassurance excessively? Cognitive Therapy and Research. 20 interviews (10 OCD, 10 health anxiety).
    pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5504131/