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**Bernard:** Hello, everyone and Happy Valentine's Day. Today is 14<sup>th</sup> February and this is our next episode of Words and Actions. And we, the hosts, and that is Erika Darics. Hello, Erika.

**Erika:** Hi, Bernard and Veronika, hello.

**Bernard:** And Veronika.

**Veronika:** Hello there, I'm here as well.

**Bernard:** There you are, yes. So, we were thinking of which topic could we talk about on Valentine's Day? And there are a couple of candidates, think about self-branding for instance or impression management could be one as well.

**Veronika:** Very important.

**Bernard:** Yes, absolutely. But we touched upon those issues in previous episodes, or we will in future episodes. So, we released the cynical beast in us and I'm not sure who it was, but anyway. So the topic we came up with for today's episode, Valentine's Day, is...

**Veronika:** Crisis communication.

**Bernard:** Yes. Crisis communication, absolutely. So, there are a couple of things that we can say about crisis communication, and we will do that in the introduction. So, we'll talk about types of crises, and how you can actually deal with them. We will also have an interview with Matteo Fuoli, who's an expert from Birmingham University on crisis communication and more specifically apologies, which might often also happen on Valentine's Day, especially when people forget it's Valentine's Day.

**Veronika:** On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, indeed, yes. After the fact, yes. (Laughter)

Bernard: And this is new, actually to the episodes, we will have a bit of data analysis but not from business this time. But we will have a look at an actual love letter but through a business communication lens, if you like.

Veronika: So, seriously, though. We give this Valentine's framing, but in actual fact, whether it's a personal crisis or a business crisis, we're dealing with the same core values, really, that are at stake. We talk about big things like trust and honesty and respect. And there may be something to learn even for our personal lives maybe, from crisis communication strategies. Also, perhaps the less likeable sides of us, so denial, excuses, remorse, apologies, we deal with a lot.

Erika: And not least because very often, especially in case of politicians' or celebrities' personal life or criminal behaviour (laughs) is on the borderline of being public or personal. And then, think of Bill Clinton, Jeffrey Epstein, Harvey Weinstein and all those big cases that we saw recently in the media. The important thing to remember here is that crises don't necessarily have to be devastating in all cases. We need to remember that crises don't necessarily have to have negative outcomes. It really depends on how they are dealt with.

Veronika: Indeed, there are clearly devastating cases, but there are also cases that could turn one way or another. And indeed, that is the literal meaning of crises, comes from ancient Greek, and it means literally turning point. We still find that in medical language, when you say the patient is in a critical condition, which means they may live or die, really. It's worth remembering that, that the response to a crisis very much impacts on how the crisis is going to develop in future.

Erika: And as we always say, it's not just what the communicator does, but it also involves how that communication is perceived. So, perception and other people's perspective is also crucially important when it comes to personal and public crises.

Veronika: So, to perhaps introduce a model, here. Very often you say, "Okay, so, if it's a corporate crisis, was it homemade? Is the company itself

responsible for a crisis? Or was it something external that they couldn't help?" That makes a crucial difference of course, in terms of reputation and whether they have to apologise. And another way of distinguishing in between crises is was it sudden?

Does it suddenly happen, either internally or externally? Or did it develop over sometimes years or a very long time? So, all that affects how the company should communicate during the crisis.

So, most of us perhaps think when we hear crisis it's something sudden, because usually when it's a corporate crisis or it's something by a public figure we learn about it in the media and to us it seems sudden.

So, one thing for instance I think it was in 2019, was it? Some of you may remember the case where a couple of boys in Thailand got lost in caves. They were a football team, and they got lost in caves with...

Erika: Yes.

Veronika: Remember that? Yeah?

Bernard: Yeah.

Veronika: And there was this massive rescue operation and the entrepreneur Elon Musk, he actually offered to lend his equipment for the rescue operation. And the rescuers said, "Well, thank you, but no thank you. But your equipment is actually not what we need. It's just not up to the task." And he then took personal offence at that and called one of the cave rescuers a, quote, "paedo". Short for paedophile and that person said, "Well, this crosses the line." And took him to court.

And it was found actually, that in Elon Musk's favour that he hadn't meant it literally. It was just a common insult, so that's quite interesting.

Bernard: Okay.

Veronika: That brings us back to impoliteness, we talked a bit about that in the episode when we talked about customer communication, didn't we? So, that was something that was clearly internally generated was Elon Musk perhaps not choosing his words very wisely and it was very sudden.

Bernard: Right. So, in that particular case, he is the one to blame and it happened within the company. Maybe I can go to the opposite extreme to give another example of something that is external and gradual. And then, I'm thinking of the companies, let's say that we work for, universities.

Veronika: Please don't call them companies, Bernard. (Laughter)

Bernard: Let's say institutions. Okay.

Erika: Shall I remind you of our second episode about the discursive construction of reality and just how important our words are?

Bernard: No, you're absolutely right. Universities are not interested in money whatsoever, so we call them institutions.

So, what I noticed, and maybe you noticed that as well in the UK is that the number of language students is dropping significantly. And that has been happening for the past let's say in my case or Belgian universities 10 years. And there's no real internal cause, the language departments themselves are not to blame for that, the external cause, but I think the picture is complicated.

But one of the things that we notice is that in secondary education, hard sciences are promoted a lot. Is that happening in the UK as well?

Erika: It is the same over in the UK, yes.

Veronika: If anything, it's even more so the case in the UK, I think, because so many British people are monolingual, because English is a lingua franca, a language that people use to communicate with each other.

So, there's often very little incentive to learn any foreign language at school and that of course then has a knock-on effect on universities, definitely, yeah.

**Bernard:** Yeah, and language departments have to deal with that crisis as well, and then you get things like people organising or recording podcasts, to put language back on the map.

**Veronika:** Yes. (Laughter)

**Erika:** Right, okay. So, my case is an example for externally caused sudden crises, and I brought a very topical one. It's the Ashley Madison crisis, which happened in 2015, when a hacker team stole data and threatened Ashley Madison website to leak the data. And the reason why this was so important because Ashley Madison is a website where people could find partners for - this is their terminology - 'extramarital relationships'.

**Veronika:** So, basically, if you want to cheat on your spouse, you would go to Ashley Madison and find somebody who would... yeah, okay, got it.

**Erika:** Yes. And it blew up, the hacker team did leak the data in several dumps or several rounds. And what happened was that several websites were constructed, enabling or allowing people to search the data and much of this data contained customer data and very confidential data as well.

And the case became very serious, followed by huge lawsuits, but also more serious consequences like suicides, people who were exposed. So, as you can imagine, if the listeners are interested in crisis communication, there are very good examples from both Ashley Madison and also all those websites that enabled the search of the data, to read these announcements and public apologies.

**Bernard:** There is one final type, I think. So, internal and gradual. And to illustrate a particular case here, I will ask you a question, Veronika and

Erika. Do you remember the days when you went to the local photographers with your film rolls to have them developed? And you had like 12 pictures or 24 or 36 of them? Do you remember what the brand of those rolls is? What is the brand you associate with those film rolls?

Veronika: Agfa.

Bernard: Agfa is one. Yes. And I remember...

Erika: And Kodak, I think of Kodak, is that the one?

Bernard: I remember the yellow boxes, yes, yellow boxes with the red letters and that was Kodak. Where is Kodak now? It used to be hugely popular in the 80s and you had these local photographers and specialists, but what happened is digital photography in the early 2000s. And basically, they arrived at the party too late. So, they stayed in the local shops and people started buying their cameras in the bigger outlets, the electronic shops.

And they didn't have shelf life there, so it was very hard for them. And then, afterwards, the cameras came, the integrated cameras in the mobile phones. So, what happened with Kodak is because they didn't respond to the fast growing and changing markets.

Veronika: They were left behind. Yeah.

Bernard: Yes, share prices dropped spectacularly and Kodak is still there, but they are actually small players now compared to Canon and Sony and Fuji for instance.

Veronika: And that's an internal crisis, it was not intentional, obviously. But it was internal, and they could have done something about it, and they also had a lot of time to do something about it. They just didn't read the sign of the times as it were.

Bernard: Absolutely, yes. Spot on. Yeah, well said. That's it, that is what happened with Kodak.

Erika: Yes, and I guess the most important takeaway from these categorisations is that whether something is sudden or gradual, internal or external, will really affect how that company or how that organisation has to respond to that crisis, right?

Veronika: Yeah. So, sometimes people distinguish between preventative and reactive crisis communication strategies. So, do you build trust or are you already at a stage where you have to repair trust? That's something we'll come back to with our interview guest for today, definitely.

Bernard: So, when you're talking about repairing trust, then we're talking about the things already mentioned like apologies.

Veronika: For instance, yeah.

Bernard: Yeah, for instance repairing trust, but we'll talk about some more strategies later on. One preventative strategy is a notion that is called 'stealing thunder' in communication sciences. And basically, linking it back to the Valentine's theme that we have today, the message is if you're planning on cheating on your wife and she's about to find out, she'd better hear it from you and not the other party involved, let's say.

And it also applies to businesses, if you experience that there is a crisis in your company, a good strategy is to talk about it first and not let's say the media. Now, of course many companies do not do that because of risk assessments. First, they want to know how big the crisis is, secondly some companies also feel that admitting there is a crisis is also admitting to blame and being responsible for the crisis, which is not always the same. So, it's complicated.

Veronika: Yeah, and there may be legal repercussions of this.

Bernard: Of course.

Veronika: When you apologise, and that may mean that you have to pay some sort of compensation to somebody. But of course, that's one strategy,

so stealing thunder. We mentioned apology  TRANSCRIPTION CENTRE as well. What else is there how companies can react?

Erika: Maybe we can have a chat about theories to bring about image restoration. Various strategies by which companies or indeed individuals can restore or repair their image, going from denial, which is self-explanatory, simply saying, "I didn't do it" or shifting the blame. And then, somewhere in between denial and taking responsibility is when you want to evade responsibility, so you come up with excuses or justifying what happened, you express your good intentions.

Or perhaps you can make efforts to reduce the offensiveness of the problem. So, you kind of strengthen your positive image rather than talk about the things that you did, you talk about the good things you've done before.

Bernard: Or that you will do in the future, for instance.

Erika: Yes. Or portray yourself in a more positive light or downplay the issue. And then, of course, on the other extreme end from denial is what

crisis communication literature calls mortification which is taking full responsibility.

Veronika: Yeah, so from that it seems like we have two extreme endpoints of a scale. When you have to repair trust, which goes from denial and sometimes even then attacking the messenger or what have you. That's one end of the scale. And at the other end of the scale, you have the full-blown apology and taking responsibility. And apologies are something that we hear a lot, and that has also been researched quite a bit, hasn't it?

Erika: Yes, I have a very interesting study that I brought for today, which comes from social psychology, where researchers were asking random strangers at a train station for their mobile phone. And in some cases, they would say, "I am so sorry about the rain, can I



borrow your phone?" And in cases where they apologised for the rain, not their fault...

Veronika: Which is really not their fault.

Erika: ...47% of the people who they approached handed over their phones, as opposed to 9% where there was no apology at all. So, sometimes the power of apology is in just the words themselves and not necessarily what's being said.

Veronika: Yeah, I guess they sound more deferential if you start with an apology, and then you're making a request like, "Can I borrow your mobile phone?" Which is quite a big request, but you've been deferential first, so you prepare the ground. It's really interesting. Now, one person who knows a lot about apologies and trust and corporate communication, etc. is our interview guest for today, Dr Matteo Fuoli.

So, hello, Matteo, nice to have you on for the episode.

Erika: Hello.

Matteo: Hello.

Bernard: Hi.

Matteo: Thank you for having me. Hi.

Veronika: So, Matteo Fuoli works at the department of English Language and Linguistics at Birmingham University in the UK. Actually, he and Erika are at the moment in the same city, at least. And Matteo is an expert on looking at how companies use language to build or repair trust in public discourse. Obviously, especially around a crisis, we've talked about that in the first part.

And Matteo does very interesting work, he's a linguist by training, and he uses his skills to look at the language of companies around crises, both with computer assisted methods but he also uses experimental methods in his research, which are borrowed from psychology. So, maybe we'll have a chance to return to that. But first of all, we'd like to talk about perceptions.

Erika: Yes, I would like to actually set us off with a question about perceptions. We mentioned perceptions in the first part of our podcast. And since you examine trust and trustworthiness, I would very much like to know what do you think matters more; being trustworthy or being perceived as trustworthy? Is there a difference?

Matteo: Well, that's a really good question. Well, I think when it comes to trust, perceptions are obviously very, very important, because trust by definition as we know, involves risk, it involves taking a leap of faith. So, when we trust someone, we're always relying on incomplete information and our own subjective assessment of others. I would say that trust is always inevitably grounded in our subjective perceptions.

This is particularly important I think in the case of corporate crises because as members of the public we have very limited, if any, direct contact with companies. We don't know what's going on, we don't

know what they're thinking, we don't necessarily know what they're planning.

Veronika: That's true, there's little transparency, yeah.

Matteo: Yeah, there's an issue of transparency, for sure. Now, does that mean that being perceived as trustworthy matters more than actually being trustworthy? Ultimately, I think that for a company being trustworthy – by which I mean genuinely acting in a way that is trustworthy, that is respectful of society's laws, values, expectations, what have you – is in the long run a strategically safer and more beneficial strategy.

Veronika: Never mind the ethics of it.

Matteo: Yeah. Beyond the ethics, that's implied obviously. But regardless of the ethics, from a pragmatic perspective, in the long run it's a safer and more beneficial strategy.

Now, a company might be tempted to duck responsibility after a crisis, because that strategy might work in the short term, but it's a risky strategy in the long term.

There is an interesting study, for example, by Peter Kim which shows that if a person who is accused of breaching someone else's trust, denies guilt, but is later found to have lied, they will lose more trust than if they had admitted guilt in the first place.

Veronika: Yeah, that makes intuitive sense, yeah.

Matteo: It does, doesn't it? Because lying itself is a breach of trust, which adds to the damage caused by the initial violation. So, obviously I would say from an ethical perspective honesty is crucial, critical and should be at the top of any company's agenda. But it also makes pragmatic sense in the long run, because lying is always going to be a risky gamble.

Erika: Yes, but we talked about image repair and there is a continuum of various activities that you can do from denial, to taking full responsibility. So, I don't know if lying is a good way of approaching this, because the perceptions are very fluid. So, are there any specific factors that can influence those perceptions?

Matteo: Sure. I'm just saying that for example when you try to avoid responsibility or deny that you've committed a certain act that is considered unethical, when you're doing that there's a possibility that you might not be truthful. Of course, if a company didn't actually engage in any trust damaging behaviour and any unethical behaviour then they have all the right to deny that and to rebuff the accusations if they can prove that.

But putting that aside, obviously, communication is really important and can have a very strong effect on perceptions for the reason that we discussed earlier, that we don't really have direct access to what companies do within them, inside them.

Veronika: Can you perhaps tell us a bit about the language side of things? So, to build trust, the perception of trustworthiness and to build or repair trust in a crisis, what kind of language features have you observed that companies use?

Matteo:

Right, there can be different linguistic strategies and features involved in the process of trust building and trust repair. And to study this, I started from a very influential model of trust, that identifies three aspects that matter to our perceptions of other people's or companies' trustworthiness. And they are ability or competence, benevolence and integrity.

And so, this goes back to what Erika was asking me just now about what are the important factors of trustworthiness? And so, depending

on which theory of trust you subscribe to, you will get a slightly different answer to this question. But I think there's broad consensus that these are the core aspects of trustworthiness. How can these features be expressed through language?

Veronika:

Through language, yeah.

Matteo:

So, one important set of features is what as linguists we would call evaluative language. And that is a broad umbrella term for language that is used to convey a positive or a negative subjective opinion on something. Obviously, for trust repair companies would use positive evaluative language to emphasise how competent, how honest, and how caring they are. And that's a way of building or repairing trust.

So, I can think of for example one case study I looked at, BP and their communication after the oil spill in 2010. And one striking feature of that text was the fact that the author of the text he used words like 'extraordinary', or 'major' to emphasise the scale of their response to the crisis.

Veronika:

So, really intensifying words.

Matteo:

Intensifying words, exactly, intensifying words that frame the company's actions and behaviour in a positive light.

Veronika: So, that's one way. Yeah, okay. But I believe in your research you've also looked at images, right? So, can you tell us a bit about that, the role of images in crisis communication?

Matteo: Right, yeah. I think that's a hugely under-researched area, which I think is really, really important because of the fact that corporate communication today is highly multimodal and it's becoming increasingly multimodal thanks to new media and how easy new media make it for us to combine and for companies to combine text and images and videos.

Previous work, and this was just an exploratory project, I looked at how a Swiss pharmaceutical company called Novartis used pictorial and multimodal metaphor as a trust building device.

Veronika: Can you give us an example? What would such a multimodal metaphor look like?

Matteo: Definitely, yeah. So, in this video that I analysed, the video revolved around a metaphor where the body was represented as a complex natural ecosystem. And that was done through computer graphics. So, in the video you see blood vessels being represented as rivers, with cells being fish and stuff. The lungs as forests and the brain as the stormy sky. So, it's all really visually stunning and mesmerising which is what makes the video really interesting and very engaging.

Erika: So, why would you say that this is a trust building device or how does build trust?

Matteo: Yeah, I'm getting to that. So, the idea is that at the end of the video, then there is a slogan that goes something along the lines of "We fight to protect this wilderness and we will never give up." Something like that. And then, Novartis basically is using this visual metaphor as the basis for an argument, for a trust building argument, right?

First of all, that they are competent because they can provide expert care that is needed to protect such a complex ecosystem. And also, that they truly care because we should protect the body world, as we should protect wilderness.

Veronika: This taps into environmental discourse.

Matteo: Definitely, I think there's a very interesting cross discursive, inter discursive link there, that the company is drawing on in this video to make a potentially persuasive argument they can be trusted to deliver

healthcare and to act as a responsible company because they really care. They are not in it for the money, if you see what I mean. They're in it because they have this mission, that they want to protect the body world.

Veronika: That's a fascinating example, we'll make sure that we get this video and put it on our website.

Matteo: Absolutely, yeah.

Bernard: I would like to go back to language now again, Matteo, if you don't mind. Because before, you were talking about being trustworthy, you were also talking about lying and denial. And then, I would actually like to link this to your 2017 article with a very striking title, and it says, "Denial outperforms apology in repairing organisational trust" and then "despite strong evidence of guilt". This is to me something of an example of "do not try this at home", especially not on Valentine's Day. (Laughter)

Matteo: Okay, that's a good one.

Bernard: What I'm interested in is the context, because I'm sure that you can't really generalise this, or can you? So, in which context did you examine this? And how does this turn out to be the case?

Matteo: Well, yeah, definitely, don't try this at home. And I can tell you that this is not the result that my colleagues and I were expecting from this particular study and we offer possible explanations for why this was

the case. But yeah, let me give you a little bit of back story about this study. So, what we were interested in was to examine the role that evidence plays in how perceptions of trustworthiness develop.

And this is important, especially in the early stages of a crisis, when we would have very limited information about what happened. So,

every bit of evidence that is available will potentially have a big effect on our beliefs and attitudes. And so, what we thought was going to happen is that when evidence is weak, people are going to trust a company that denies more than a company that apologises, because they will give the company the benefit of the doubt.

But when trust is strong, we expected the opposite effect because the strong evidence would undermine the credibility of the denial.

Bernard: Yes.

Veronika: Yeah, that makes sense.

Matteo: But what we actually found is that denial outperformed apology, and this was very surprising, hence the very sensational title of the paper. I think that this really boils down to what we were saying earlier, that denial might work as a sort of short-term fix but will backfire and cause even more damage in the long term.

And adding to that I think there are other possible factors that might have played a role in this particular study, the fact that for example the experiment was carried out in Sweden, which is one of the countries with the highest levels of trust in the justice system. That could have played a role, so participants might have thought justice will ultimately prevail, the company will not have a strong incentive to lie because it will be difficult for them to get away with it, because we trust our justice system that justice will...

You know, this is a possibility, but also it might have been due to partly at least to the way that the denial was worded in the experimental materials. It was a very strong denial on the part of the company, involvement might have been also a factor. So, there's a lot I think to still explore about when denials work and when not.

But let me be absolutely clear, we're not recommending that companies should deny responsibility or that lovers deny any guilt especially on Valentine's Day. That would be ethically wrong and a risky strategy for the reasons we discussed earlier.

Bernard: Right.

Veronika: Okay, so maybe one last question. I think that ties in with that study you just talked to us about. In terms of especially those people in our audience who are interested in discourse analysis and are linguists themselves. You are a bit unusual in your methods, in that you also use experimental methods, which is not routinely done in discourse analysis. Could you just very briefly tell us a bit about what that adds and how that is a useful thing to do?

Bernard: One example, if I can pick up on that, is the importance of language, and that's the main reason why we're having this podcast. What I notice, for instance, when we talk about apologies is the way you phrase that apology, that can be crucially important for perceptions of people as well. And that has been under-studied in other branches or disciplines.

Matteo: Yeah, I totally agree. So, when is an apology too apologetic? Sometimes you have those so-called non-apologies, of the kind, "I'm sorry if our ads offended anyone". I think it's interesting from a theoretical and empirical perspective to look at how people respond to different wordings. And it just shows how important language is in the exact phrasing of an apology.

It's not just what you say, but how you say it.  **TRANSCRIPTION  
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And I think it's something that we as linguists can really bring to the table using a variety of methods. Of course, when I'm saying I'm a big fan of experiments, I don't see experiments as the only method or a method that should be used in isolation, that's part of a toolkit.

And I think actually, the best research, in my opinion at least, is research that really brings together and harnesses the strengths of different methodological approaches, bringing them together.

Erika: And on that note, we might also add that it's also the best way for practitioners and our listeners to learn from and understand the power of their choices in language and images, even.

Veronika: Well, thanks a lot, Matteo.

Matteo: No. Thank you.

Veronika: It has been really, really fascinating to listen to you talk about crisis communication, use of language in trust repair strategies, use of images as well. So, I think we got a lot out of this, and hopefully our audience will as well.

Matteo: Thanks very much.

Veronika: Thanks a lot.

Matteo: Thank you for having me. Thank you.

Veronika: As we said initially, as always, we have a bit of analysis. And today we went with a non-corporate text. We went with a love letter, which also includes an apology. Bit of a tragic case, really, but there we go. So, a bit of background, this is an historical letter, dates back from 1928. And it was written by the artist Thelma Wood to her former partner at that stage, Djuna Barnes, the writer.

So, they had an eight-year relationship, mostly in Paris, although they were both from America. And it was a very troubled relationship for most of its time, so they were both drinking heavily, and Thelma was

very frequently unfaithful to Djuna. And at one point, it just broke apart after many, many difficulties.



And I'll just read out that bit of the letter that Thelma writes to her former partner after they've broken up, when she's back in America.

She says, "Djuna, beautiful, I know I had lost you. I realise every misdeed committed in eight years would come back, that everyone in Paris would be against me. The knowing you saw us", and here she refers to one of her affairs, "The knowing you saw us, I had said such terrible things, I hated myself. Something I did care about. It seemed a shame for foolishness to spoil us.

I wanted no acknowledged disloyalty, and after you came back from New York, I loved you so terribly. And my one idea was to wipe out the fact that I'd been stupid. As for the rest of our eight years, you seem to have had a pretty rotten time with my brutishness, and I'm sorry. Sorry."

Erika: (Laughs) All right.

Veronika: So, yeah, what's going on there?

Erika: I guess it's a really nice example of mortification. So, if we want to use the theory, there you go, this is taking full responsibility.

Veronika: Yeah, she says, "My brutishness" in the end, and she said, "I had said such terrible things". So, she brings herself in and takes responsibility. But she only does that half of the time really, because it starts off with "every misdeed committed". So, there is no indication of who committed any misdeed, really. So, here she does not take responsibility.

Bernard: True.

Veronika: And then, later she talks about "it's a shame for foolishness to spoil us", what do we make of that?

Erika: Right, it's like a third agent, it's neither of us, it's something else, an external entity who is acting here and not us. If we want to match it against the image repair theory, maybe this is a classic example of evading responsibility, finding an excuse or blaming it on something else.

Bernard: Yeah, what I also see there in a way, and that's another strategy that you can find in business communication as well, crisis communication is a sense of victimisation. Where you're saying, "We suffered as well" or, "I suffered as well". And I see that in "everyone in Paris would be against me", what is the relevance of that in the apology or the love letter that she's writing to the other person?

To me that's saying, and probably she also suffered, but maybe it's not that relevant in this particular case.

Veronika: But yet, she starts with it, she really starts with it. So, "Everyone is against me" so self-victimisation, because she had these endless affairs and one affair became public through rumours or what have you. And now "everybody is against me" so that's a bit whiny really, isn't it? (Laughter) It's all about her.

And then, later when she talks about the effect of all of this on her former partner she said, "You seem to have had a pretty rotten time" and she actually mitigates that. So, it's not a rotten time or a terrible time, it's just pretty rotten. So, it sort of downplayed a little what it meant for her former partner.

Bernard: Yeah, if you read this with the perspective from the partner, that might be actually quite offensive, if you really had a very, very bad time and someone refers to it as a "pretty rotten time". It's almost cynical.

Veronika: It is a bit.

Erika: Yes.

Veronika: So, it's going back and forth between yes, mortification, saying sorry, but then also making it sound impersonal. And the impact on her seems to be more important to her than the impact on her former partner, which perhaps gives us a clue as to why this was all written after the fact.

Bernard: Yeah, that's what I notice as well. How effective is this apology, still? And then, linking it back to business communication, an apology in itself in many cases simply won't do. So, what you try is you try to offer repair, a kind of compensation or promise that it will never happen again in the future, going back to the affairs, for instance.

And in this particular case, that is no longer possible, it is what it is, and the only thing that she can do is apologise. The question however, we have to ask ourselves is how effective is this now, at this particular point in time?

Veronika: Certainly, during the relationship there will have been lots of making promises. Again, like within corporate communication, "Yes, we had this massive oil spill but in future we'll be much more careful with how we transport crude oil," or what have you. And then, it may happen again, and at one point the customer might just say, "You know what? This is not a responsible company. That's it." And vote with their feet, as the phrase goes.

Erika: I guess the angle or that point on image repair or trying to portray ourselves still in a positive light in spite of all the things we've done, whether a cheating partner or whether a company who did something wrong is a very important point to remember. That this is also about trying to create an image of ourselves.

Veronika: Yeah, now we're aware that not everybody may be interested in these affairs of the heart. Personally, for instance, I never do Valentine's

Day. And if you thought that was all a daft idea really, why are they doing this Valentine's special? Take heart, on our website, we will

have a really hard-hitting business example of an apology and crisis communication.



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And we'll add a bit of analysis, so head over to our website [www.wordsandactions.blog](http://www.wordsandactions.blog) and you can find more examples there that you may be interested in or that may be useful for your own teaching, perhaps.

Bernard: Shall we introduce or include a spoiler? It's about a certain fast food chain that sells chicken, or at least nuggets and things like that. Yeah.

Veronika: Okay, so check out the website for that. We'll be back for our next episode.

Erika: Listen to us next month as well, and don't forget to leave a review and rate us on any software where you get your podcast from.

Veronika: Okay, thanks for listening this time. Bye bye.

Bernard: Thank you very much, bye bye everyone.

Erika: Thank you, bye bye.

END OF AUDIO