



Gratitude and Appreciation

3 December 2012

Hello,

Okay, I confess, this is December, and so you are going to read yet another post on giving thanks. This is after all the season to be festive and jolly and give thanks. But this is also the season to start planning for 2013; a time of setting new goals, and I want you to think about focusing on gratitude and appreciation, not only in December, but each and every day of the year.

If you are someone who has more in common with Scrooge, then research suggests you should change. Gratitude is good for you. Psychological studies show that people who express gratitude have reduced anger, lower incidences of aggressive behaviour, and better mental and physical health. The more we express thanks for what we have, the more we have empathy and concern for others and, well darn, that just means we are nicer people. Expressing gratitude is good for us and good for others, and something worth doing every single day of the year. And according to the experts this is a skill we can learn, so don't come with the excuse that gratitude is just not one of your talents.

The earlier in life and the more often we practice gratitude the better we get at it. So let's get going.

Develop a Gratitude Habit

Firstly you need to start with you. It is no good focusing on what others are, or are not doing, when you do not practice what you preach. A habit is something that we do almost automatically. It does not take a lot of thinking and a lot of will-power to do. We just do it. However, to create a habit you need to consciously make the time, on a regular basis, to take the appropriate action. So decide how you want to show gratitude and then how often you will do this. Start with a plan and schedule your actions in your diary. If it takes three weeks to develop a habit then after a month you will be well on your way.

Expressing gratitude

What to do? Well that is entirely up to you. You can express gratitude and appreciation by yourself or with others through talking through or writing down what you are thankful for, or you can take some actions that demonstrate your gratitude to various people. Just bear in mind that if you are doing something for someone it must be something they would like.



A good way to start is to show gratitude as one of the first things you do in the day. The plus of this, is not only that you can tick it off as done, but - and this is important - you start the day well. You start the day feeling positive and appreciative, and with this as your focus, the rest of your day is likely to be filled with positive and appreciative feelings and actions. Big gifts and gestures are absolutely not necessary. Sometimes the smallest surprises are the most meaningful and beneficial. It is often the small and personal that touches the hearts of people the most.

Suggestions:

1: *Write down everything you are grateful for.* Yes, you may wish you had a bigger house, or you could afford that pair of shoes, but this is about acknowledging what you do have. So write down everything you are grateful for: The roof over your head, the food you eat, the friends you have, the pets who adore you, the places you have visited, the people you have met who may no longer be in your life but brought you so much happiness, etc., etc..... You may find it difficult to start, but once you get going you will find you can write down pages of things you are thankful for. If you want to (and I recommend it) start a gratitude journal and write in it every single day. Each day add things you are grateful for. Read your list every day. You can also read your list when you are feeling down and you will feel better. This is a very effective way of feeling better when you are down. When your thoughts are focusing on things you are happy about, you cannot feel miserable. You cannot think positive thoughts and feel negative. Try it and see.

2. *Appreciate the people in your life;* those close to you, as well as those you may not know that well. Say thank you to them for specific things they have done which have meant a lot to you. Buy them a small card or gift to say thank you. You could leave a card at the dinner table listing all the things you are thankful for or that they have meant to you. If you are a boss try doing this for your workers - you will be amazed at the goodwill you build up.

3. *Create an appreciation board.* Take photos, find pictures, or write messages on your board. Encourage others to do the same. You can have one for yourself. You can have one for your family that you place in the kitchen or entrance hall, or you can even have one for your work department at the entrance to your offices.

4. *Write thank you notes.* You can write notes to your children, your partner, your children's teachers, the fireman or police, the staff at your local hospital, the waiter in the restaurant, and so on.



Being thanked and having a reason to thank both express the positive in human behaviour. And when you talk to people who regularly give thanks and express gratitude, they will tell you that being thankful results in having even more to be thankful for. What you focus on is magnified. And how good is that!

I hope these tips help you get motivated to start being grateful. We might not have exactly what we want, but when we appreciate what we do have, more of what we want follows. And all that's left is for me to say thank you to you all for your support, and to tell you how much I appreciate all the comments and feedback from readers.

Happy Holidays! Be safe!

With best wishes

Penny