

EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

"Our life is what our thoughts make it." Marcus Aurelius

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TOPIC THIS ISSUE:

REVISITING THE POWER OF GRATITUDE MAKING THANKSGIVING A DAILY HABIT

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INSIDE THE SURPRISING NEW SCIENCE OF GRATITUDE

By: ERIN WILDERMUTH (RESEARCHER & AUTHOR)



It is easier to be thankful during Thanksgiving. The name alone inspires a sense of appreciation. Mix that general feeling with turkey, good wine, family, and friends and even the busiest, overworked American can find a reason to stop and be thankful. The challenge is maintaining a thankfulness habit throughout the year.

All too often, life gets in the way. Assignments need to be completed, employees need to be managed, and flights need to be caught. Presentations need to be given, equipment needs to be maintained, and reports need to be filed. On top of your more-than-full-time job, daily tasks affiliated with raising children, maintaining relationships, and keeping yourself sane have to somehow fit into your schedule.

It is easy to become so preoccupied with meeting goals and succeeding in life, that we forget to enjoy and appreciate the ride. A thankfulness habit is a natural remedy. Like most habits, it takes time and effort to establish. Recognizing the many benefits of thankfulness is key to prioritizing its development.

Thankfulness will not only make you happier, it will help you to achieve your very real goals. It will strengthen your relationships, help to maintain your health, and ultimately enable you to live a more productive life. You don't have to take my word for it; the science of thankfulness is well documented. Here are five proven benefits of thankfulness to get you motivated.

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1. Thankfulness combats stress

The many impacts of stress on our health are still being uncovered. We know it can be bad, but we're not always sure just how bad. With every study, the severity and extent of this relationship deepen. Stress impacts the gut, decreases activity levels and can lead to irritable bowel syndrome. There is even evidence chronic stress can quicken cancer progression.

The good news is that thankfulness combats stress. According to Carolyn Youssef-Morgan, gratitude is the antidote to work stress. Gratitude has been linked to well being by too many studies to list. Positive reframing is one reason for the connection. When people practice gratitude they are more likely to see the good in challenging situations. They face adversity head-on. They find the silver lining. Positive reframing, and the thankfulness that helps us to achieve it, are powerful tools against stress. When you combat stress, you also avoid accompanying the health consequences.

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2. Thankfulness builds emotional resilience

Thankfulness improves mood and can even conquer more than the run-of-the-mill blues. Studies with those who suffer from depression onset by chronic disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, and spinal cord injury have found that gratitude can help people to overcome even the most traumatic adversity.

This style of resistance can be applied to more than physical trauma and psychological disorders. Mental strength helps a person to keep fighting when the odds are against them. It helps us to do what is right thing even when it is hard. Resilience helps us to win the war, even when multiple battles have been lost. Professional success cannot be won without it.

3. Thankfulness fosters connections

Sororities are all about connections, but how do they cultivate them? One way is through gratitude. A 2008 study published in *Emotion* found that success rates of Big Sister Week, designed to solidify relationships between members, succeeded based on gratitude. Big sisters spent the period giving surprise gifts to assigned new recruits. At the end of the period of giving, matches were revealed. Little sister gratitude ratings, which corresponded more closely to how thoughtful they considered the gifts than how much they liked them, predicted the strength of their connection to their big sister and their feelings of integration in the sorority a month later.

Strong relationships and solid connections are paramount to a happy life. They are also often the cornerstone of professional success. Networking done correctly is fulfilling, enjoyable, and personal. Success doesn't spark to life in a vacuum.

4. Thankfulness improves sleep

If you've ever gone without sleep, you know how important it is. Sleep helps us navigate the world. It allows us to think without thinking, unweaving the web of our day. It keeps us sharp and focused. Anything that improves sleep, improves us. Thankfulness is one such thing.

A 2009 study found that gratitude improves sleep duration and quality, even when controlling for personality traits that might influence sleep. A 2016 study turned to biology. Gratitude was correlated with better sleep

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and decreased blood pressure.

5. Thankfulness rewires your brain

You may have heard the phrase “neurons that fire together wire together.” Pathways that are used are strengthened. The stronger the pathways, the easier they are to access. Scientists have identified the parts of the cortex that are activated by thankfulness. They are involved in emotional processing. They also set off like firecrackers when activated by gratitude. These are two parts of the brain you want to wire with the pathways of positive emotions.

Though the many benefits of thankfulness are worthy of a significant investment of time and energy, the actual investment necessary is surprisingly low. A simple gratitude journal, where you write down five things you’re thankful for every night before bed, can do the trick. Thankfulness may change your lifestyle, but it doesn’t require a lifestyle change. A small dedication to positive change is all the investment you need.

KEEP GRATITUDE GOING

BY: CHERYL BACHELDER

(FORMER CEO OF POPEYES CHICKEN & AUTHOR)



“We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.”

John F. Kennedy

A recent Gallup survey on engagement at work found that 80% of working Americans hadn’t heard the words ‘thank you’ at work, over the past 7 days. I find that sad and disheartening. Appreciating the contributions others make, and sharing gratitude

are cornerstones for building strong relationships. This holiday season, I challenge myself and all of you to express your gratitude and say, ‘thank you’ as often as you can.

1.8 Ways to Show Gratitude at Work <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/say-thanks-at-work/>

There are many ways to say, ‘thank you’ at work. Sometimes just being available to listen demonstrates your gratitude. This article explores a few other options for letting your co-workers and employees know they are valued.



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2. The Importance of Gratitude at Work

What things were you grateful for at work today? Studies show that focusing on what you appreciate in others, instead of what you don't like, can transform relationships and teams. Are you ready to give it a try?

3. TED Talk: Want to be Happy? Be Grateful

The one thing all humans have in common is that each of us wants to be happy, says Brother David Steindl-Rast, a monk and interfaith scholar. And happiness, he suggests, is born from gratitude. An inspiring lesson in slowing down, looking where you're going, and above all, being grateful.

Book Recommendation:

The Gratitude Diaries: How a Year Looking on the Bright Side Can Transform Your Life by Janice Kaplan

Journalist and former Parade editor-in-chief Janice Kaplan makes a promise to be grateful and look on the bright side of whatever happens. She realizes that how she feels over the next twelve months will have less to do with the events that occur than with her own attitude and perspective. Getting advice at every turn from psychologists, academics, doctors, and philosophers, she brings us along on a smart and witty journey to discover the value of appreciating what you have.

**6 WAYS TO LEVERAGE THE
GRATITUDE ADVANTAGE**

BY: JON GORDON
(SPEAKER & AUTHOR)



“Thank you.” These are two words that have the power to transform our health, happiness, performance, and success. Research tells us grateful people are happier and more likely to maintain good friendships. It reduces stress, improves our sleep, and floods our bodies with endorphins that energize us, instead of hormones that leave us feeling drained and depleted.

Gratitude and appreciation are also essential for a healthy work environment. In fact, the number one reason why people leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated. A simple thank you and a show of appreciation can make all the difference. That's why it's important not only to practice gratitude yourself but also to foster a culture of gratitude with your team and organization.

Thankfully, gratitude is like a muscle. The more we do with it the stronger it gets. In this spirit here are five ways to put the power of “thank you” to work today:



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1. Take a daily thank you walk

I started this practice fifteen years ago and it has changed my life. It's simple, it's powerful, and it's a great way to feed yourself with positivity. How does it work? You simply take a ten-to-thirty minute walk outside, in a mall, around your office, on a treadmill, or *anywhere else you can think of* and think about all the things—big and small—you are grateful for.

When you combine gratitude with physical exercise you give yourself a double boost of positive energy. You flood your brain and body with positive emotions and natural antidepressants that uplift you rather than the stress hormones that drain your energy and slowly kill you.

2. Practice meal-time thank you's

When having a meal with your friends and family or coworkers, go around the table and have each person say what they are thankful for. Encourage people to expand on why they are thankful. Not only will this help frame the meal towards a positive perspective, it's also an opportunity for you to get to know each other better by understanding what each other values.

3. Make a gratitude visit

Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, suggests we write a letter expressing our gratitude to someone. Then we visit this person and read them the letter. His research shows that people who do this are measurably happier and less depressed a month later.

Yes, it might feel odd—but it works. Try it. Today schedule and make a gratitude visit to an old boss or mentor, a friend who helped you through a tough time, a family member or someone who made a difference in your life.

4. Say thank you at work

According to a John Templeton study of 2,000 Americans, we are *least likely* to feel or express gratitude at work. And when we're listing what we're grateful for, or jobs come in dead last. It doesn't have to be like that.

When Doug Conant was CEO of Campbell Soup he wrote approximately 30,000 thank you notes to his employees and energized the company in the process. Leaders can energize and engage their teams by letting them know you are grateful for them and their work.

Organizations spend billions of dollars collectively on recognition programs. But the best and cheapest recognition program of all consists of a sincere "thank you." And of course, don't forget to say thank you to your clients and customers too.

5. Be positively contagious

Research shows that emotions are contagious. Sincere smiles, kind words, encouragement, praise and positive energy infect people in a positive way. On the flip side, your people are just as likely to catch your bad mood as the flu.

So each day you come to work you have a choice: You can be a germ or a big dose of Vitamin C. When you choose to be positively contagious your positive energy has a positive impact on your colleagues and ultimately your culture. ***Your team will remember very little of what you said, but they will remember 100 percent of how you made them feel.***

6. Celebrate daily success

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According to research conducted at Harvard University, **the last thirty minutes of every waking day is recorded and replayed that night by our subconscious minds fifteen to seventeen times.** This replay occurs five times more often than any other thought at any other time. Thus it's important to go to bed thinking positive thoughts. If you go to bed thinking and feeling like a champion you'll wake up thinking and feeling like a champion, optimistic and ready to win.

Today, before you go to bed, celebrate your success of the day. Identify the one great thing about your day—the one great conversation, accomplishment, or win that you are most proud of. Or identify the one person you helped most today or the one thing that made you smile. Focus on your success, and look forward to creating more success tomorrow.

If you have kids, make sure you do this with them to help foster the kind of gratitude that will fuel a lifetime of significance and success.

