

CULTIVATE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE!

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all other.”

CICERO

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In the coming month, why not strive to show appreciation in numerous ways? Here are two ideas to get you started:

• Write a Daily Note

— Researchers have also discovered that individuals who write a note of thanks can improve interpersonal relationships for up to six months. John Kralik discovered this for himself. His wasn’t satisfied at work, he was divorced twice, and he wasn’t close to his children. Remembering his grandfather’s advice to be grateful, he decided to write 365 thank you notes over the next 365 days. He not only experienced a change in attitude, he



experienced a change in life, which he wrote about in his memoir, *A Simple Act of Gratitude: How Learning to Say Thank You Changed My Life*. “I don’t need a scientific study to know that if you are grateful to people and if you learn how to accept gratitude well from other people, your life will be enriched,” he said. “The first effects are that you realize you have a much better life than you thought.”⁸

• Invite Your Family to be Grateful

— During this year’s Thanksgiving dinner, take a few moments and ask your guests to write a simple note of gratitude for their family, friends, or life in general. You could get them started by reading this quote from Today Show host Savannah Guthrie: “[N]o matter what the circumstances, on a daily basis I try to take a deep breath and be thankful for all I have,” she said. “Making a concerted effort to count your blessings every day is the absolute key to happiness.”⁹

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GRATITUDE with a NEW ATTITUDE

BY GORDON BOTTING DRPH, CHES, CFC

In the midst of America’s bloody Civil War, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving Day as a national holiday, “a day of Thanksgiving and Praise.” He was not the first president to decree such a holiday. George Washington proclaimed Nov. 26, 1789, as a day of “sincere and humble thanks.”¹ Both presidents understood the benefits of cultivating an attitude of gratitude.

In recent years, the scientific community has studied the positive effects of gratitude. In one study, published in the journal *Personal Relationships*,

researchers found that feeling and showing gratitude help to protect marriages from the harmful effects of spousal conflicts. They interviewed 468 married people, asking about their marriages and if they felt appreciated by their spouses. Those who felt their partner communicated appreciation and gratitude were less likely to suffer from instability in their marriage. In addition, those who felt valued by their spouses were more likely to show gratitude.²

The study of gratitude seems to be a hot topic nowadays. The Greater Good Science Center at

“Gratitude is the memory of the heart.”

J. B. MASSIEU



STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

UC Berkeley is currently working on a multi-year \$5.6 million project called “Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude.” The researchers want to learn how gratitude affects health, personal and relational

well-being, and human development. Once they find out what works, the center wants to promote “evidence-based practices of gratitude in medical, educational and organizational settings.”³

Gratitude Makes a Difference

Unfortunately, we often neglect to show appreciation to others—even those closest to us. Many years ago, Thomas Carlyle, a well-known author and philosopher, had a devoted wife named Jane. Most of the time he just shut her out of his life, but she attended to his needs and kept hoping that he would show more appreciation and gratitude to her. One time when Jane was feeling low, she asked why he didn’t praise her for the delicious food she had prepared.

“Woman, must you be paid for everything you do?” he rudely retorted and then left the room. After Jane’s death, Thomas found her diary with tear stains on its pages where she had written: “Oh, I wish you would say a kind word or give me a compliment now and then about the things I try to do to make you happy.”

Carlyle was a brilliant writer, but he failed in the area of gratitude. He could have made Jane happy, but he failed to give her even a few words of thanks.⁴ Contrast Carlyle’s failure to show appreciation to his wife of many years with the following incident when dozens of people expressed appreciation and gave encouragement to a woman they hadn’t even met!

LouAnn Alexander had worked as a flight attendant for 34 years when she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. As her brother was flying to see her, he asked the flight attendant if he could speak to the passengers. He told everyone on the plane about LouAnn’s struggle and showed them her picture. Then he handed out napkins and asked if people would write something on them for his sister. Ninety-six passengers wrote messages of appreciation, hope, and encouragement. The ultimate note came from a passenger who wrote, “Your brother made me love you, and I don’t even know you.”⁵

A Grateful City

Gratitude is helping the city of Houston to heal after it was devastated by the recent Hurricane Harvey. During the terrible flooding, more than 400 people in Houston had a comfortable place to be safe, thanks to Jim “Mattress Mack” McIngvale. He sent out his furniture delivery trucks to bring people into his two furniture stores to sleep on new mattresses, sofas, and recliners. Members of the National Guard also sheltered there. Gratitude for McIngvale, and those like him, helped bring the city together after the storm. More than 170,000 signed a petition to honor him.⁶ Thousands of people also expressed their appreciation for the first responders and volunteers who risked their lives to save others.

Train Your Brain

Science is showing us that our brains can be trained to be grateful! In one study, researchers recruited almost 300 adults who suffered from depression and anxiety. The scientists randomly assigned each person into one of three groups. Everyone received counseling, but one group was asked to write a letter of gratitude to another person each week for three weeks. (They didn’t have to send the letters—just write them.) The second group was asked to write their feelings and

thoughts about negative experiences they had. The third group didn’t have an assignment. “Compared with the participants who wrote about negative experiences or only received counseling, those who wrote gratitude letters reported significantly better mental health four weeks and 12 weeks after their writing exercise ended.”

“Gratitude is something of which none of us can give too much.”

A. J. CRONIN

The rest of the study was too involved to go into all the details here, but about three months after it began, researchers used an fMRI to measure the brain activity of some of the participants, as they were



passing on money to a worthy cause. Researchers found that “the gratitude letter writers showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex when they experienced gratitude in the fMRI scanner. ... While not conclusive, this finding suggests that practicing gratitude may help train the brain to be more sensitive to the experience of gratitude down the line, and this could contribute to improved mental health over time.”⁷



Thomas Carlyle