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## **Gratitude and why it's healthy to remember what you're thankful for**

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Next week many of will gather with friends, family and loved ones to celebrate Thanksgiving. This is always a time of emotions - the good, the bad and sometimes the ugly. This year, especially, many folks are struggling emotionally, dealing with issues around finances, losing their job or their home or feeling threatened, scared or pessimistic about the economy.

Regardless of how you're feeling there are some very good reasons to be thankful regardless of what your personal circumstances may be.

First, being thankful is the first step to a better life. Robert Emmons, a psychology professor at the University of California Davis, and colleagues have been conducting studies into the benefits of gratitude. Here is just a sampling of the benefits being thankful can have:

- **Greater Optimism and Physical Fitness:** People who kept weekly gratitude journals exercised on a more regular basis, felt better physically and about their lives in general, and had a more optimistic attitude about the upcoming week than people who recorded negative or neutral things in a journal.
- **Achieve Your Goals:** Those who kept gratitude lists were closer to attaining their personal goals after a two-month period than those who did not.
- **Stress Relief:** Being grateful is also an effective way to release stress, according to Emmons. Gratitude research is beginning to suggest that feelings of thankfulness have tremendous positive value in helping people cope with daily problems, especially stress, he said in a WebMD article.
- **Greater Sense of Well-being and Positive Emotions:** People who are grateful report higher levels of positive emotions, vitality and life satisfaction, and lower levels of depression and stress.
- **Helps You Cope With Illness:** Among people with a neuromuscular disease, Emmons found that a 21-day gratitude intervention produced more high-energy positive moods, a greater sense of feeling connected to others, more optimistic ratings of ones life, and better sleep duration and sleep quality, relative to a control group.

Gratitude and thankfulness are extremely healthy emotions and ones that can be cultivated if we are open to it. Positive emotions also tend to open us to even more to be grateful. Gratitude attracts the positive in our experience.

Sincere gratitude seems to unlock abundance in our lives. Numerous scientific studies indicate people who are thankful and grateful for what they have are happier, have better relationships and enjoy better health --- a few reasons it helps to have an attitude of gratitude. But there are practical reasons too. In one study the participants who had been in the gratitude condition reported having made more progress toward their goals.

### **What do You Have to be Thankful For?**

Ideally, some of you already have a running list of why you're grateful in your head or in a journal by your bedside. I highly recommend you start a gratitude journal of your own and add to it each and every day.

One way of cultivating gratitude is to simply look toward what you already have in your life that you either are or can be thankful for, and then allow yourself to fully welcome the feeling of gratefulness as best you can.

Another way to open to being thankful is to release your dissatisfaction with what is. The more you let go of wanting to change what is, the more you feel grateful for what you already have without any additional effort.

Regardless of how you're feeling about your life in this moment, and perhaps to give you a bit of inspiration for your own gratitude list, remember these four things that you definitely have to be thankful for:

You have the gift of life.

You have the ability to make choices.

You are in control of your life.

You are able to enjoy all the little things (sun rises, sunsets, clouds ), if you choose to.

The following vignettes, which have been widely circulated around the Internet, help to put things into perspective and remind us all of what we have to be truly thankful for:

- If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75 percent of the people in the world.
- If you can attend a church or synagogue meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death you are more blessed than 3 billion people in the world.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are more blessed than 500 million people in the world.
- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and spare change in a dish, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.
- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

### **Sharing your blessings**

Finally, gratitude and thanksgiving aren't just once-a-year or even once-a-month things. Spending time each day giving thanks for the blessings in your life (and everyone has blessings they can count) is a great habit to develop.

Jeff Keller, author of "Attitude is Everything", says, "It costs you nothing to be grateful and appreciative, yet it has a considerable impact on the quality of your life. Openly share your gratitude with others. And, the next time somebody asks if anything great happened to you today, you'll have plenty to say!"

Finally, perhaps come up with a way to thank or acknowledge people in your life who are often overlooked; some possibilities:

1. Send a bouquet of flowers to a busy mom, a teacher, a mentor, a colleague, a friend.
2. Write a thank you post-it note to a co-worker and paste it on their computer or desk; bring a co-worker a cup of coffee, hot chocolate, or tea; invite a co-worker to lunch.
3. Offer support to a military family in your community. You could send a note of comfort, help out with work around the house, or offer to take someone to lunch. Some of these folks have been away from their loved ones for months and could really use your loving kindness.
4. Speak to the boss of an administrative assistant or other support person who has provided you with exceptional service and let him or her know how great you were treated.
5. Send a thank you card to someone who would least expect it, like your auto mechanic, lawyer, accountant, dental hygienist, or doctor.
6. Bring a box of goodies to the office, or to your post office, your local fire department or police station, and let the employees know that you appreciate them. They rarely get this kind of acknowledgment, and the surprised look on their faces is heart-warming.
7. Leave a larger than normal tip hidden under a cup for your favorite restaurant server, or in a card to your newspaper delivery person.
8. Write the words "thank you" on the bills you pay this month
9. Bring some homemade cookies to a local Veteran's or Nursing home.
10. Send a note of thanks to the teacher who takes good care of your son or daughter.
11. Give freely of your special talents, skills, knowledge or time to support someone who could use some help right now.
12. Perform a random act of workplace or community kindness out of gratitude that you can.
13. Stop for a moment and browse through your address book to identify the people who serve you, keep you safe, or help make your life easier in some way. Then, consider the people in your place of work, your neighborhood, community, family or friends. Who could use a special acknowledgment, a word of thanks, this or next week? Make a list of maybe five people and thank one special person every day.

Generally, appreciation means some blend of thankfulness, admiration, approval, and gratitude. In the financial world, something that appreciates grows in value. With the power tool of gratitude, you get the benefit of both perspectives: as you learn to be consistently thankful and

approving, your life will grow in value.

Happy Thanksgiving!

**So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

For whom and for what are you grateful?

Do you take time every day to express gratitude for what you have?

Do you know you are truly a work of art, a masterpiece, in your own right?

Who do you know who could use a supportive word or act of loving kindness right now, this minute, today, this week? What would it take for you to offer that word or act right now, today, this week? Will you?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, [www.truenorthpartnering.com](http://www.truenorthpartnering.com), or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda