

The Power of Gratitude

(aka, The Case of Pollyanna vs. Negative Nelly)

“Opportunities, relationships, even money flowed my way when I learned to be grateful, no matter what happened in my life.” ~ Oprah Winfrey

The secret to greater happiness and success may be more attainable than you think.

Research reveals that taking a few minutes to list the things that make you feel grateful provides a powerful boost of well-being, energy and positive emotions.

This quick exercise also yields greater productivity, determination and optimism. Practicing gratitude fosters better relationships, social ties and career success. Grateful people sleep better, exercise more and have fewer symptoms of physical illness. They’re more likely to be perceived as prime candidates for promotion.

Once a week, write down five things for which you’re grateful.

- Sunday, January 12, 2014 - I am grateful for.....
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

And do this on the same day, at the same time each week for the year.

If success is as simple as this, why aren’t more people keeping a gratitude list?

Perhaps they think it’s a bit hokey — a project reserved for touchy-feely types. Yes, putting in the effort sounds a bit simplistic. But there’s clear evidence that even the most competitive, hard-driving executives benefit from doing so.

The science of happiness provides ample proof that certain practices and exercises improve one’s well-being and mood. When you feel good, you’re more likely to be enthusiastic, generous and supportive of others.

When gratitude becomes a habit, you no longer require a special event to make you happy. You become more aware of the good things that happen every day, and you start to anticipate putting them on your list.

“KIND WORDS CAN BE SHORT AND EASY TO SPEAK, BUT THEIR ECHOES ARE TRULY ENDLESS”

MOTHER TERESA

The Case against the ‘Polly’ in ‘Anna’

Some executives would assert that expressing positive emotions in the workplace denies the harsh realities of 21st-century business, which is too fast-paced and competitive to dwell on people’s feelings.

It’s true that dishonest or inauthentic positive attitudes create even more negativity. We have to be able to deliver bad news in ways that will be received and encourage the desired changes. For example, when you need to give negative feedback, you must speak honestly and respectfully, and still have an impact.

Multiple [surveys](#) tell us that feeling unappreciated is the No. 1 reason why most Americans leave their jobs. Such statistics have been underlining the need for positive reinforcements ever since the [Gallup Organization](#) began surveying millions of people in the workplace.

In fact, 65% of people surveyed said they received no recognition for good work in the previous year, note Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton in [How Full Is Your Bucket?](#) (2004).

What employees (and people!) want most... is appreciation and in the workplace, quality management as well, Gallup research tells us. When employees fail to feel acknowledged and disapprove of their managers, they leave or simply stop trying.

The Case for Polly

Not surprisingly, we gravitate toward positive energy and away from negativity. Like animals and plants, humans are [heliotropic](#) (literal translation: moving toward the sun). When we're kind to each other and express gratitude, we experience an energy surge that unlocks our inner resources.

We more accurately process positive information. We think about positive statements 20% longer than negative ones. We learn better, remember more and are more resourceful when we experience positive moods.

Several studies confirm that people live longer when they're more appreciative. Gratitude and positivity stimulate the production of hormones that fight stress and fortify the immune system.

Although positive thinking is attractive to most, we also have a negative bias at play that must be counteracted.

The Case for Negative Nelly

We humans have a strong survival instinct that draws on our ability to spot threats. We react quickly and intensely to warning signs. Negative headlines sell more newspapers, and people gravitate to TV shows that highlight negative behaviors.

We can pay more attention to criticisms than compliments. Negative events have a greater effect on our mood and behaviors. A healthy dose of negativity allows us to spot and avoid problems.

But too much focus on negativity saps our energy and compromises our ability to find necessary solutions.

Managers and leaders must therefore counteract the pull of negativity and the tendency to fixate on bad news. This means that as a leader, team member or friend, we need to seize opportunities to influence outcomes by emphasizing positivity and gratitude.

Ask yourself this important question: How can I help others (and myself) overcome negative events (and the Nellys of the world) and move forward?

"Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust and hostility to evaporate"
Albert Schweitzer

How to Be More Positive (and Successful)

Be willing to invest 5 minutes a week in making a gratitude list. It's quick, unbelievably easy and provides immediate benefits.

You'll need to sustain this practice to reap ongoing benefits. Like any habit, keeping a gratitude list takes some discipline at first. An ongoing commitment will allow it to become a natural, established practice in your life.

A word of caution: You may feel gratitude just by thinking about it, but it won't last. Thinking isn't doing. It isn't real until it is written! Daily or weekly practice — actually writing down five things for which you're grateful — will deliver lasting results.

Here's a short list of three books referred to in this article. However, there are now a multitude of books published just in the last decade about gratitude and happiness which merit reading.

Gratitude Book Resources

Tal Ben-Shahar, [*Even Happier: a Gratitude Journal for Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*](#), McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Kim Cameron, [*Practicing Positive Leadership: Tools and Techniques That Create Extraordinary Results*](#), Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013.

Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, [*How Full Is Your Bucket?*](#) Gallup Press, 2004.