

GRATITUDE

What is gratitude?

Gratitude is the demonstration of understanding of how fortunate we are in this amazing country of ours, and an appreciation of all the good around us. At a bigger level, it is the gratitude of how fortunate we are as the global society of humanity.

Gratitude is a positive emotion, perception, energy, attitude or feeling of appreciation for something that one has or experiences. Sometimes gratitude takes us over spontaneously, at other times to have gratitude is a matter of choice.

Why is it important to have gratitude?

Gratitude is perhaps an undervalued emotional state. You might find that if you were to ask a few people what they are grateful for, they would really have to stop and think about the answer. However the benefits of cultivating an 'attitude of gratitude' are too many to be overlooked.

Cultivating gratitude can positively impact every area of your life and the lives of those you interact with. A business is going to be more successful if employees are appreciated and respected, because staff are more likely to be loyal and conscientious towards a company that values them in this way. Customers give repeat business, and pass on referrals, if they feel their suppliers value them and appreciate their business. Colleagues work together more effectively in an atmosphere that promotes collaboration rather than competition, and we collaborate when we appreciate the pool of talents, skills and experience that are available via our colleagues.

Practising gratitude has the power to make us see the abundance that already exists in our lives. Abundance isn't about getting more things until we finally feel that we've got enough (and you may have noticed that that goal post keeps moving anyway!). Gratitude is about appreciating all that we already have, which in itself has a hugely positive effect on our experience of life.

We get what we focus on because we are simply training our brain to notice specific things and to ignore other things. So if we focus on the positive ingredients in our lives we start to notice and appreciate more and more of them and this brings feelings of contentment, joy and satisfaction. If we focus on the negative, the same thing happens in reverse, i.e. we start to notice more and more of the things we don't want, and we spiral ever more negatively instead of positively.

Which way would you rather operate?

In addition to the positive effect that gratitude has for us as individuals, it also spills over onto people around us; if we are full of appreciation and give voice to it, people around us are more likely to catch a glimpse of their own life in this way. So by practising gratitude and appreciation we are modelling a behaviour pattern that that will benefit anyone who picks up on it, whether consciously or unconsciously (we learn most easily by modelling and this is very often a totally unconscious process).

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of gratitude?

There is a tendency in our modern world to somewhat over focus on the pursuit and acquisition of things, as a way to make ourselves feel good or satisfied, while we're not being fully aware of how fleetingly 'things' actually work in creating a sustained sense of well-being. For most of us it is actually intangibles, such as friendship, love, knowledge, learning and peacefulness for example, that bring us joy and fulfilment in life.

It is hardly surprising that we sometimes get caught in the acquisitive cycle because we can go online, order anything from anywhere, and have it immediately downloaded into our inboxes. Such things as instant credit, instant food, instant music and instant movies are all readily available. Patience and waiting are not behaviours that are modelled as often as they have been in times past.

In years gone by, people saved up for things, and when they were finally able to acquire the desired item, the satisfaction and appreciation would run deep due both to having to wait and due to the effort and commitment that had gone getting the desired object.

Nowadays, some people are disassociated from the value of things, because they can be acquired so quickly, without necessarily having the resources to pay for them up front. There are many ways to buy now and pay later, and, in this way, the link between output of effort and reward received has been obscured.

Another reason some people may slip up when it comes to gratitude, and appreciation, is because of the speed of modern life. It's all too easy to feel pressured to immediately jump to the next item on the agenda, having acquired or achieved something, instead of giving ourselves the chance to feel appreciation or to celebrate our achievement. To appreciate things we sometimes need to slow down and practise being awake and aware in order to tune in to our sense of gratitude.

Sometimes we can find ourselves surrounded by negative attitudes, which rub off on us, and pull us into this prevailing mood. It sometimes takes effort to choose to think differently from the crowd or our peer group.

Sometimes we may find ourselves criticising or condemning people who we perceive as being more successful than us in some way. In these instances it could actually be the case that our own feelings of inadequacy are being sparked and we want to avoid connecting with this feeling so we focus on criticism of others. This strategy is actually a way that we simply keep ourselves stuck; it has no effect whatsoever on those we are giving a hard time to and we are denying aspects or areas of our selves that we would actually benefit from examining and strengthening. How we react to others usually tells us more about ourselves than it does about the other.

Gratitude might be something that needs working at, because of the need to slow down enough to pay attention to the details of our lives where gratitude tends to abide. This isn't always easy if we are living a high-paced existence. One way to glimpse the areas where we are truly grateful and appreciative is to imagine how we would feel if we were to suddenly lose various ingredients of our life i.e. our job, or our children were to become sick, or our partner to end our relationship, or a close friend or relative pass away. This strategy can serve the purpose of waking us up to what really matters.

At the end of the day material things are replaceable (and only a very few of them actually meet survival level needs) whereas what is not replaceable, and what really matters to us, tends to be such things as our loved ones, our friends and our health. When we practise appreciation of what deeply matters to us (on a values level) we start finding ourselves naturally appreciative of the events and circumstances of our lives as they actually occur in the here and now.

Evaluate your own levels of gratitude

- How do you feel in relation to your job, your family and friends, your belongings in terms of gratitude? What is it that you truly value the most?
- What practises do you undertake to cultivate gratitude and appreciation? Perhaps you write a daily 'gratitude list', perhaps you say thank you regularly (both to others and internally), perhaps you take walks and let the wonder of nature fill you with gratitude?
- What events or circumstances naturally spark a rush of gratitude within you? This could be such things as making eye contact with a baby who then gleams at you unreservedly, or noticing a plant that has just fully blossomed, or experiencing the sense of team bonding after a close win at footy, or beating your own personal best on the running track. We are all different, so there is no right or wrong way to experience gratitude, and your examples may be very different from these.
- When you pay a bill, do you feel appreciative of having the money to be able to make the payment? And do you sometimes find yourself appreciating the benefit of receiving the service or utility provision?
- How often do you voice your appreciation of your colleagues, friends and family and, when you do, what impact does this have?
- How often do you wake up in the morning with a feeling of excitement at the prospect of a new day with all the possibilities that that brings?
- If you have a moment of feeling jealousy towards someone you perceive as having or being more than you, do you then counter this by taking stock of the good that is in your own life? What are your strategies for moving back into an appreciative attitude?

Improve your gratitude

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Keep a journal every day for a 2 week period. Notice and write down your feelings in relation to gratitude and try some of the following suggestions:
 - Notice how often do you spontaneously voice appreciation of people in your life. See if you can increase the regularity with which you do this.

- Notice how you handle it if you find yourself feeling critical of others. What strategies could you put in place to let go of your criticism and shift your focus to what you appreciate about them instead?
 - Notice how you respond to people who seem happy and content with their lives, and what they have, and see if you can increase the frequency with which you show them appreciation for what they have achieved.
 - Notice when gratitude spontaneously arises in you and notice what sparks it.
- Have a look at your belongings – is there anything that you simply “had to have NOW” that you have barely looked at since you got it? If so, consider why you bought the item, what feelings it generated, and how you now view the item in question.
 - Think of someone who has exceptional standards of gratitude. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 10, what would you be)? And what behaviours or actions do they exhibit that made you rate them as exceptional?
 - Think of the least grateful person you have come across. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 1, what would you be)? And what behaviours or actions do they exhibit that made you rate them as ‘unsuccessful’?
 - At the end of each day make a list of at least 5 things that you are grateful for. You might include such things as ‘my comfortable, warm bed’, ‘my health’, ‘my family’s health’, ‘the delicious dinner I ate tonight’, ‘the roof over my head’ and so on. For each of the items on the list, write down at least 2 benefits you get from having them in your life.
 - If you find yourself complaining or generally feeling ungrateful regarding something specific, take a moment to see if you can find a way to change the way you are viewing things.

For example, if you are feeling angry because your partner is late home from work and forgot to pick up some milk, try focusing on how beneficial it is that your partner has a job that contributes to your financial well-being, and think of how fortunate it is that shops stay open late so it’s still possible to get some milk before the day is over.

In the world of psychology, this is called Cognitive Therapy, and it is one of the most effective approaches used in the treatment of depression. It is based in the fact that there are always multiple ways to view any event, and on the fact that our thoughts produce our feelings. So, by seeking out more positive ways to view events and situations, we set ourselves up to have a better emotional experience.

- Write a personal gratitude statement and place it somewhere prominent. You can include things from your daily list – especially ones that you notice pop up regularly. Make sure you read your gratitude statement at least once a day. This will mean that you build the habit of gratitude until it becomes part of your natural way of operating.
- Make a personal commitment to showing your gratitude for others. Tell your partner why you appreciate them, tell your friends what their friendship means to you, or your boss why you like your job – not only will it make you feel better, but you will also be positively impacting the lives of others. “Be the change you wish to see in the world” Ghandi.

- Read (auto) biographies of people who have had to struggle against horrific conditions to survive and have gone on to have lives beyond what they ever dreamt possible for themselves (it's stunning just how many of such stories there are). Note the gratitude that is infused in their stories. Allow the stories of others to inspire you to acknowledge all the ways in which you are fortunate.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of gratitude, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources. The list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as "sustainable decision making" and you'll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

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High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Sharon Chisholm for his work on this document. Sharon is the Promotions Manger for High Ideals as well as a professional coach with DreamEagles Life Coaching. To find out more about Sharon, please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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