



Unleash the Power of Gratitude

As I write this to you it's cold, gray and feels more like January than November in Iowa. Very conducive to writing a newsletter unless the urge to curl up in front of the fire with a hot cup of tea and a good book prevails. I'll admit I've been drawn more to the latter rather than the former today. I've wrestled with the topic for November. I always want my newsletters to be relevant, meaningful, and helpful to cultivating wellness in some way. I was hesitant to tackle gratitude because it seems so cliché this time of year. But you know what? As I got to thinking about gratitude I experienced a shift. The more I thought about it, the less I was compelled to take the tea, fire and book route this afternoon. I started getting clarity, felt energized, and surprisingly, my inner groan at having to sit down and write turned into excitement. Just by thinking about gratitude I unleashed its power! So yes, I'm talking about gratitude this month, because I want you to experience its power for yourself.

But before we dive in deep to gratitude, let's get real for a moment. The gratitude I'm talking about isn't just a shallow "thank you" delivered to others or focused on once a year. It's a practice and comes from a deep appreciation. **Gratitude is like a muscle that needs to be worked often in order to maintain its power and strength.** Practice implies doing something intentionally, with effort, repeatedly over time. This type of gratitude isn't careless or done just to be polite. It is honest, thoughtful, and heartfelt.

Research done by Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough confirms that gratitude is not just a cliché phenomenon. When implemented, gratitude creates powerful results. They found that people who practice gratitude experience a whole slew of benefits from feeling happier and more fulfilled with their life, to getting sick less often, sleeping better, enjoying closer personal relationships, and more resiliency during challenging times. Pretty good reasons to practice gratitude!

But back to reality. Even if we know the benefits to being gracious, sometimes it's really hard! Life isn't always a box of chocolates. In fact, sometimes life is really sh*tty. If you're experiencing financial hardship, just received some difficult news, or are mourning the loss of a relationship or loved one it can be really challenging to be grateful. I know earlier this fall when

we had a health scare with my son, business felt stalled, and we unexpectedly had to purchase another vehicle because our old van was deemed unsafe to drive, gratitude was not the first thing that came to mind. Grumbling, complaints, and thoughts of “why now?” were taking up prime space in my mind. How do you handle that?

First, don't beat yourself up for having negative feelings because you are, after all, human. Second, while you recognize your initial gut feelings, also acknowledge you don't have to dwell in them. This is where the “practice” part of gratitude really comes into play. You need to be intentional about switching mindsets.

One strategy to find gratitude amidst hardship is to focus on the present moment, for that is where power lies, where choice occurs, and energy shifts happen. When we're experiencing a challenge sometimes we get stuck in the past (mourning what we once had) or the future (stuck in fear or mourning what will never be). If we focus on the present moment we open up to appreciating what is right now. I'll use myself as an example. When dealing with having to get a new vehicle, worry about how we would afford it set in. But then, when I took myself out of the future and into the present I found many reasons to be grateful. Most importantly, thank God we didn't end up having an accident from this safety issue! I was also thankful that we had a 2nd vehicle to use as a back-up and weren't without transportation entirely. This situation also provided an impetus for me to really go for it in my business so I could start taking in profits. Sometimes appreciating what a tough situation can elicit or open up for you, is a way to cultivate gratitude in the face of adversity.

Ready to unleash the power of gratitude in your life? Try some of these gratitude-inducing activities.

Create a gratitude ritual.

This could take the form of keeping a gratitude journal, lighting a candle in honor of something you are grateful for, singing a praise, meditating on gratitude, or simply going around the dinner table and sharing something for which you are grateful. You don't necessarily have to do it every day, but you have to be intentional about making it happen.

Write a thank you letter to someone who has been an important figure in your life.

In the age of digital everything, a hand-written note is something really special. Writing requires us to be very thoughtful in how what we communicate. By thinking about what we want to say, we then bring our attention and energy to gratitude.

Do a 1-minute gratitude “blast”.

This practice is particularly helpful if you need to get yourself out of a rut and shift your mental energy. Grab a piece of paper, set a timer for 1-minute, and write out as many things you are thankful for that come to mind. Don't give up if you can't think of many to start. Give yourself the full minute, and the more you dig, the more might come up. Helpful hint: After you're done

with this exercise, save your list and post it in a visible place. That way you will be reminded frequently of all there is to be thankful for.

Savor a particularly enjoyable experience.

Robert Emmons has found that becoming aware that an experience is about to end, and savoring it, actually enhances gratitude. Reflecting on my own life, I have found this to be true. Back when I had just had my daughter, I really savored cuddling her, nursing her, and watching her go through those baby milestones because I knew she would probably be my last baby. So even on those nights when she thought it was a hoot to be up between 1 and 3am, I was able to shift from annoyance, exhaustion, and frustration to some gratitude. Not every night mind you, but if I was intentional about framing these early morning escapades as treasured moments, gratitude exerted its power. Essentially, this is an exercise in appreciating what is right before us in the present moment.

Take a challenging situation in your life and flip your perspective.

Here's where reframing gratitude as appreciation is helpful. Not many people would include losing a job, a loved one, or having to go through a painful ordeal at the top of their gratitude list. However, can you take that challenging situation and appreciate what it is teaching you? How has the challenge helped you grow in some way or get stronger? What new channels or opportunities have opened up as a result of this challenge? I know from talking to some breast cancer survivors they while they never would have wished to get cancer, they are very grateful for the new relationships they formed through their support group.

In closing, remember the wise words from Thornton Wilder, who said:

**“We can only be said to be alive in those moments
when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.”**

I am so deeply grateful to all of you who have stuck with me as I navigate through life and business. As a thank you, let me provide you some tools to stay well this coming holiday season. Stay tuned to my Facebook posts (www.facebook.com/wellfinity) for my Holiday Sanity Savers series, featuring helpful tips for navigating holidays with less stress, more gratitude, and more joy. A heartfelt thank you to all of you!

Shelly

Live with Intention, Love Yourself, Create Balance, Fulfill Your Purpose & Thrive!

