



Cultivating Virtue in Leadership

GRATITUDE

in Educational Leadership



Overview



- What is it?
- Why do you want it?
- How do I get it?
- How do I help others get it?
- Resources





What is Gratitude?



Gratitude involves a feeling of thankful appreciation for the good things one receives. It is defined as an **other-directed moral emotion** which has been linked to being *interested in the needs of others and of society* (Michie, 2009).





Positive Psychology



Gratitude is an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has—as opposed to, for example, a consumer-driven emphasis on what one wants.

Gratitude is getting a great deal of attention as a facet of positive psychology: Studies show that we can deliberately cultivate gratitude, and can increase our well-being and happiness by doing so. In addition, gratefulness—and especially expression of it to others—is associated with increased energy, optimism, and empathy.





Appreciation = Gratitude?



The essence of the **feelings** that accompany an attitude of appreciation is **virtually the same** as for gratitude. For some people **appreciation is a far easier concept or attitude** to apply, because it *does not necessarily imply that there is someone else to whom one should be appreciative or grateful, or some spiritual or divine entity one should be thankful to.*

If you are someone who does not totally relate to the meaning of gratitude - for whatever reason - you can use the term appreciation instead.





Quote for Consideration



Gratitude should not be just a reaction to getting what you want but an all-the-time gratitude, the kind where you **notice** the little things and where you constantly **look for good**, even in unpleasant situations.

Start **bringing gratitude to your experiences, instead of waiting for a positive experience** in order to feel grateful.

[Marelisa Fabrega](#)





Positive Outcomes



Research has shown that gratitude facilitates:

- greater sense of **well-being and happiness** (e.g., Watkins et al. 2003; Emmons and McCullough, 2003), that it
- promotes effectively **dealing with stress**,
- enhances **personal growth** (Emmons and Mishra, 2011) and
- leads to an **open attitude** that is an **essential characteristic of servant leaders** (van Dierendonck, 2011).
- making **new friends and promoting trust** (Emmons and Mishra, 2011).



More Positive Outcomes



- More than any other personality trait, gratitude is strongly linked to **mental health and life satisfaction**. Grateful people experience more joy, love, and enthusiasm, and they enjoy protection from destructive emotions like envy, greed, and bitterness. Gratitude also **reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders**, and it helps people entangled with those and other problems to heal and find closure. It can give you a deep and steadfast trust that goodness exists, even in the face of uncertainty or suffering.
- Not only is gratitude a warm and uplifting way to feel, it **benefits the body** as well. People who experience gratitude cope better with stress, recover more quickly from illness, and enjoy more robust physical health, including lower blood pressure and better immune function.
- Unlike other positive emotions like hope and happiness, gratitude is inherently relational: it reaches past the person experiencing it and into the **social realm**. It is gratitude in large measure that inspires people to acts of kindness, since it's natural to respond to gifts with heartfelt gifts of your own. And that strengthens your bonds with other people. Grateful people are rated by others as more helpful, outgoing, optimistic, and trustworthy.





How?



Gratitude isn't just an emotion that happens along, but a virtue we can cultivate. Think of it as something you practice as you might meditation or yoga.

- Gratitude practice begins by **paying attention**. Notice all the good things you normally take for granted. Did you sleep well last night? Did someone at work or on the street treat you with courtesy? Have you caught a glimpse of the sky, with its sun and clouds, and had a moment of peace? It also involves acknowledging that difficult and painful moments are instructive and you can be grateful for them as well. Directing our attention this way blocks feelings of victimhood.



How?



Consider **writing** about it in a journal or in a letter.

- Writing helps you organize thoughts, accept experiences, and put them into context, and gratitude journaling may bring a new and redemptive frame of reference to difficult life situations. It also helps you create meaning when you place *everyday experiences within a framework of gifts and gratefulness*.
- By writing, you can magnify and expand on the sources of goodness in your life, and think about what resources you've gained from your experiences, even bad ones.

In one study, people randomly assigned to keep **weekly gratitude journals** exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical [symptoms](#), felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to people assigned to record hassles or neutral events. In another, young adults who kept a daily gratitude journal reported higher alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy compared to those who focused on hassles or compared themselves to others less fortunate.





How?



Finally, **expressing** gratitude completes the feeling of connection. Many people in your life have helped you in one way or another. Have you thanked them? Consider sending a letter to someone telling them what their actions meant to you, even if—especially if—it happened long ago. As for a response to blessings that don't come from people, the arts and many faith traditions offer countless ways to express our gratitude. It may be as simple as a moment of deliberate reflection.



Gratitude as a Leadership Tool



Since gratitude is such a [powerful behavior](#), it can revolutionize one's leadership. Gratitude demands a response, and that response is invariably positive.

A leader who is grateful towards his or her employees gains their respect.

- The simple act of gratitude produces other behaviors. When a leader takes time to intentionally thank her employees, she gains their respect. Because gratitude is a virtue, we tend to respect those who exemplify it.

A leader who thanks his employees gains their trust.

- Gratitude can't be faked, and that's one of the reasons why it is one of the emotions that elicits most trust.
- Think for a minute about a work relationship where a boss tells his employee, "I'm really thankful for the work that you put into that report. It was the most detailed report I've seen this month, and it gave me the perfect data to present to our client."
- The employee who received that thanks isn't thinking, "Gee, I wonder if my boss is going to fire me now." Instead, she's thinking, "I trust him."
- Gratitude creates **trust**, which can serve to benefit any workplace.



Gratitude as a Leadership Tool



A leader who thanks his employees gains their effort.

Gratitude also produces greater effort in those who sense it. Someone says, “Thanks, that was awesome! You totally rocked that deadline!” That kind of grateful language is encouraging, because it’s a reward for effort. When we’re rewarded for our effort in such a way, we want to give even *more* effort.

A leader who thanks his employees gains their appreciation.

All the gratitude research that I’ve read have pointed to gratitude as one of the pinnacles of virtue. We appreciate virtue when we see it in others. Thus, when you express gratitude towards other people, your behavior will gain appreciation.



Gratitude as a Leadership Tool



A leader who expresses gratitude prevents other undesirable emotions.

Carey Nieuwhof wrote about gratitude [in his article](#), Grateful Leaders Make the Best Leaders. “Grateful people are rarely angry. And angry people are rarely grateful.”

Nieuwhof’s point is this: “Gratitude neutralizes your anger and jealousy.”

Might gratitude abolish some of the malices associated with leaders — micromanagement, authoritarianism, rudeness, etc.?



Your Most Powerful (but often forgotten) Weapon



- A recent study by [Bersin & Associates](#) underscores the bottom-line implications of saying thank you in the workplace. It reveals that companies that “excel at employee recognition” are 12 times more likely to enjoy strong business results. If you aren’t already a believer in the thank you economy, just think about what it can mean to your business if you embrace the power of gratitude.
- Research on trust has revealed not only that gratitude makes a difference but that people don’t require big gestures, just heartfelt ones. Simple but genuine thank-yous or small, handwritten notes of appreciation can mean the world to people. So if it’s so easy, why don’t we do it more often?
- When it comes to business, we fall into the trap of not seeing people when we work with them. We take them for granted and just assume they don’t need a show of gratitude. This oversight can have huge consequences, particularly if you’re the boss.





Three Suggestions

How to get out of the [lack of] gratitude rut



1. Take a few minutes each morning to make a list of three to five things you appreciate. This requires only a moment and it helps you cultivate a habit of gratitude. When we're caught up in our day-to-day routine, we easily overlook the people and things we appreciate. A daily reminder can give us a much needed happiness boost while also putting us in the gratitude mindset.





Three Suggestions

How to get out of the [lack of] gratitude rut



2. If you deal with employees, find ways to personalize your appreciation. The *method* of appreciation or the person who extends the gratitude can make a big difference. For example, some people value acknowledgement before a group, while others prefer a one-on-one thank you. This extra effort demonstrates that showing gratitude isn't just a routine for you. It makes a difference when people see that you care about what matters to them.





Three Suggestions

How to get out of the [lack of] gratitude rut



3. Leave yourself open to feedback. Part of expressing gratitude means also hearing what the other person has to say. *One of the reasons we get frustrated with gratitude is because when we do show appreciation we don't always get the response we expected.* An underwhelmed response to your display of gratitude can have several causes. The primary one might surprise you: lip service. If you show gratitude to someone who feels it's not genuine, the gesture will fall flat. If I as a manager thank an employee for doing a great job but ignore his feedback about ongoing issues, it rings a little hollow.



Research Findings



[Jeffrey Froh](#) is a pioneering researcher of gratitude in youth. He and colleagues tested a new kind of gratitude curriculum for elementary school children (ages 8 to 11), the youngest studied thus far.

First, children learned about the three types of appraisals that make us feel grateful:

- That someone has intentionally done something to benefit us
- That providing this benefit was costly to them
- That the benefit is valuable to us





- After one week of daily half-hour lessons, these students showed significant increases in grateful thinking and grateful mood—meaning that the lessons worked. Also, when all the children were given the chance to write thank-you notes to the PTA after a presentation, the students wrote 80 percent more notes than kids who didn't receive the lessons, showing that their enhanced gratitude translated into more grateful behavior.
- Compared to kids who didn't get the lessons in gratitude, these children showed steady increases in grateful thinking, gratitude, and positive emotions over time. In fact, the differences between the two groups were greatest five months after the program ended, indicating that the gratitude lessons had lasting effects.
- Overall, this study suggests that even young students can learn to look at the world through more grateful eyes—and that they may become not only more appreciative but also happier as a result.





Gratitude and At-Risk Youth



- In another [recent study](#), Mindy Ma and colleagues looked at gratitude in a very different kind of population than those used in previous youth gratitude studies: African-American adolescents (ages 12 -14) in low-income, low-performing urban schools.
- They wanted to know if, in this kind of high-risk environment, gratitude would help protect them from stresses they faced at home and school. The researchers surveyed almost 400 students from three different middle schools to see if they felt grateful emotion in response to things others do that benefit them (which researchers call “moral-affect” gratitude) or if they tended to focus on and appreciate the positives in our lives and the world (called “life-orientation” gratitude for short).





The researchers found that those who were more likely to feel grateful to others also scored higher on academic interest, grades, and extracurricular involvement; those who appreciated the positives in general scored lower on risky behaviors like drug use and sexual attitudes and activity. One factor, positive family relationships, was associated with both types of gratitude.



In other words, at least for this group of students, moral-affect gratitude seemed to enhance the positive conditions of their lives, while life-orientation gratitude seemed to buffer against some common high-risk pitfalls.





Thankful People are Successful



Legendary author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said “gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for.” We all know people who are eternally positive. They [relish](#) the opportunity to [start](#) a new day and always take on any challenge that comes their way with grace and optimism. And in return for the thankful vibes they put out into the world, good fortune is often bestowed upon them.

So, what exactly is it about thankful people that makes them wired for success?

They have a loyal following.

They are healthier in mind, body, and spirit.

They are masters of perspective.





Developing an attitude of gratitude



From making lists of the people and things that make you feel thankful to shedding yourself of toxic relationships or situations, embracing an attitude of gratitude is achievable for anyone willing to try.





Attitude of Gratitude Video



<https://www.entrepreneur.com/video/287123>





The Transformative Power of Gratitude Video



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VcN1kgN3eI&t=80s>





Question



How has the principle of gratitude manifested in your leadership experiences thus far?





Closing Activity

“Triangle-Square-Circle”



Reflection

1. Draw a **triangle** and next to it write down **three important points** from the module.
2. Draw a **square** and next to it write down anything that “**squares**” **with your thinking**.
3. Draw a **circle** and next to it write down anything that is still “**circling**” **in your head or questions** that you have.

Partially quoted from:

<http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/triangle-square-circle>





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