

Mindfulness and Gratitude
By Emily DeVoto, PhD

"Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude." -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many studies have been done on the effects of incorporating gratitude exercises into your daily life. According to the Chopra Center, people who focus on gratitude enjoy a greater sense of well-being and greater health. Taking time to be grateful also gets us to slow down and become more present and mindful with our thoughts.

Gratitude focuses our mind on all the people, things, ideas and feelings that are working for us. Being grateful puts us in a more optimistic and resourceful state of mind. It enables us to function better and be more impactful. It increases our levels of happiness.

A practice of gratitude is a simple one, yet so many of us overlook it. Why? Because we think we don't have the time, so we don't make the time.

Below, I've outlined 6 simple gratitude exercises for you. The goal of each of these exercises is to help you stop – really plug into what's working – feel grateful and calm – and then resume your day. Each of them takes a different amount of time. Some of these exercises you will really connect with, others won't be an ideal fit for you.

My Challenge For You

My coaching is that you try each one of these exercises for one week straight. Once you complete one exercise for a week, move on to the next exercise for a week. Notice your ability to be present with gratitude. At the end of the 6 weeks, pick 1-2 methods that work best for you and incorporate them into your daily practice for 6 weeks. Before you know it, you will have experienced 12 weeks of daily gratitude exercises. Let me know what you discover.

6 Simple Gratitude Exercises

Morning and Evening Questions - Some people like to write the answer to these questions down; others like to meditate on the answers. Do whichever works for you, but give yourself the gift of really doing it 100%.

When you wake each morning, answer these questions:

What am I excited about today?

How can I make a difference today?

How I can let _____ (think of a specific person) know I appreciate them today?

What can I do today to appreciate myself?

When you are finishing your work day or when you are getting ready for bed at night, answer these questions:

What is one thing I learned today?

What am I grateful for in my life?

Who can do I appreciate right now?

What am I excited about?

Feelin' Groovy Memory Flood – This is a great exercise for visual people.

Put on some great music that you can move to, close your eyes and visualize memories of people, places, things, ideas and feelings, which you are grateful for. Go for 3-5 minutes; making the memories more colorful and vibrant as you go along. Visualize and be grateful for things you've yet to experience as well.

A Walk in the Wild – Getting outside and into nature does wonderful things to the psyche.

For some people getting outside and into nature is a profound experience that instantly brings out a sense of peace and well-being. If you live in the city, you can find a place to get outside, even if it's a pocket park. Walk slowly. A 5-10 minute walk is all that's necessary to begin with. Notice everything around you. Colors, smells, sounds, textures – the small little ladybugs, each blade of grass, the blue of sky, the warmth of the sun, the diamond effect of the snow, the birds in the trees, the crispness of the air. Breathe in nature and experience gratitude for each and every part of it.

Thank the People That Matter – A heartfelt thank you goes a long way in terms of making someone else feel appreciated and special.

So many people matter to us, yet we often overlook them. Think of the dude that drives the garbage truck that picks up your trash every week. The checkers that you see at the grocery store every week. The lady who cuts your hair. Your mailperson. The guys who works on your car. Your children's teachers. Your doctor. The people you work with. Your employees. Your business associates. Your friends. And Your Family.

Write down a list of each of the people that impact you and what you appreciate about them or why you specifically appreciate them. Every week pick 1 person on

your list and then let them know you are grateful for them. Keep it simple – give them handwritten note or better yet, tell them in person why you specifically appreciate them or are grateful for them. An interesting thing happens when people start this exercise, more and more people get added to our lists as we realize how many folks make an impact on us and how many we make an impact on.

TIP: If you are doing this for just one week – thank a different person each day.

Gratitude Journal – Writing in a gratitude journal every night is a great way to get connected to what is working in our lives.

Put a huge grin on your face. Give yourself a 3-minute time limit and write down everything you can think of that you are grateful for. People who help you. People who support you. People who love you. People who you love. People who make you laugh. Places that feel good to you. Ideas or thoughts that feel good. Creative ideas. Positive things that have happened, are happening or will happen in the future. The things you love to do and can do. The opportunities you have. Resources that you have. Some people really like having great music on while they are writing – others like quiet – it’s your choice.

Gratitude Moments – Connecting with gratitude for a minute a few times a day.

This is the easiest exercise. Set 3 daily reminders on your phone or calendar. When those reminders chime, stop what you are doing, take 3 deep cleansing breathes. Close your eyes. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly. Breathe deeply and slowly through your nose as you ask yourself, “What am I grateful for in this moment?” Answer to yourself as you exhale slowly. Repeat 3 times. Stand up, reach up high and stretch. Nod to yourself in appreciation for taking a gratitude moment. Continue what you were doing. Notice how much more centered you feel and how much more clarity you have.

TIP: Try to schedule the reminders for when you are not in regularly scheduled meetings etc. If the reminder goes off and you are in a meeting – take a deep breath and then complete the exercises as soon as you are back to your office/off your call/etc.

I really hope you take the time to do these exercises and enjoy them. Gratitude has the ability to impact us greatly, in turn impacting many of those around us. Living a life with an Attitude of Gratitude is truly a blessing.

Please feel free to share this document with those you share your life with ☺

Happy Holidays,

Emily