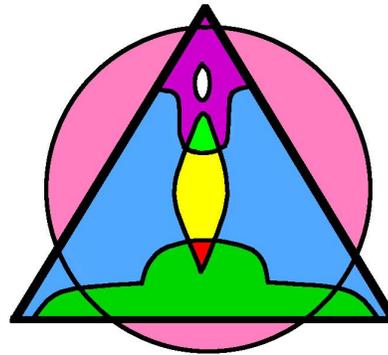


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Simple Ways To Start, Maintain and Increase Gratitude

What are the ways we can maintain a practice of gratitude that actually changes the neuro-pathways in our brains and creates a normalcy of happiness?

There are several ways to do this for yourself, and many of these things can be shared experiences with your family as well.

The first one is what I call the:

10 Minute Morning Meditation - Set your alarm 10 minutes early, and start practicing gratitude for the day in your mind, first thing, right in the bed - (make sure to hit the snooze button just in case you fall back to sleep)!

Dry erase markers on the mirrors - adopted from my friend and colleague Cynthia Farina. When we would create women's Empowerment Retreats on the East Coast, she would flood the windows and mirrors

Create and/or hang artwork or word art on the walls
Meditate on family pictures

Acts of Kindness - Think of a small or large thing you can do for someone in your life - running to the store for milk? Ask the neighbor next door if there's anything you can pick up for them while your there, or bring back their favorite fruit as a surprise.

Walk the space of your day - in your home, yard, or wherever you are, what is in front of you that you can appreciate now?

Blessing Your Food - Gratitude In A Bowl Of Soup - how far down the chain of people and places can you imagine your food has touched or traveled to get to your plate? What has the animal or plant given up just to nurish your body?

Drive With CARE - Consciously Aware Of The Ride Experience

Listen to Positive Music - Music reaches the subconscious directly - be aware of the good songs you can choose to listen to!

Appreciating Nature - walk outside - dog walk, park, or your own backyard

Breathe in Gratitude, Breathe out frustration - Whether sitting quietly or doing any activity, this mindful approach can be done anywhere!

Find A Meditation or spoken affirmations on YouTube - Just search and find the one (or thirty) that's right for you!

Gratitude List - People, places, things. Increase your inner sense of gratitude by continuing to list why you appreciate them, or add to your list daily

Model Gratitude - Lead by example for children, family, and friends

Gratitude Project/Create A Family Project - add notes about what they're thankful for. Whether you use sticky notes, a whiteboard where everyone writes with a marker, or colorful pages that can be tacked up, either way it's a great family project.

Volunteer for a Cause - Whether it's for a non-profit or an acquaintance, taking a day or more to do for others can increase your feelings of confidence and purpose as well

Share a story of the past and why your grateful for the experience on SM or with family or friends

Express Forgiveness and Appreciation - as a conscious action during the day, or reach out from a past experience

Write a Letter - to anyone! Make it full of purpose and appreciation for an old friend or family member you haven't connected with in a while

Daily Journalling

Helpful Links

<https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>

<https://www.everythingabode.com/how-to-stop-being-miserable/>

<https://www.wespire.com/recognition-vs-rewards-vs-gratitude/>

#:~:text=Appreciation%20is%20about%20acknowledging%20the,on%20behalf%20of%20someone%20else.

Transcript of Presentation:

Hi, my name is Cathleen Francois, I am a certified Hypnotist, Life Coach, Natural Wellness Practitioner and Instructor as well as an Interfaith Minister here in Southeast Michigan, and I want to thank Diane Dovico from the Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities for asking me to give you this presentation on one of my favorite subjects, which is GRATITUDE!

Gratitude is a Powerful Human Emotion

Gratitude is the thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. It's the acknowledgment of the goodness in our lives.

So, Why is Gratitude important for our physical, mental, and emotional health?

Well, Expressing and receiving gratitude actually changes the neural structures in our brain by releasing the two most important neurotransmitters responsible for our positive emotions, which are dopamine and serotonin.

Those are the chemicals that enhance our mood immediately, making us feel happy and more content.

This ultimately helps improve our health, deal with adversity, and helps build stronger relationships.

Feeling gratitude and appreciation for others when they do something good for us triggers our 'good' hormones and regulates effective functioning of our immune systems.

So by consciously practicing gratitude everyday, we can help our neural pathways to strengthen themselves and create a permanent, grateful, and positive nature within ourselves that enhances feelings of self-love and empathy.

Other Studies have shown that hippocampus and amygdala, the two main parts of our brains that regulate emotions, memory, and bodily functioning, **get activated** with feelings of gratitude, and when **we get involved** practicing consistent and deep feelings of gratitude, in some cases the higher amounts of dopamine can actually reduce physical feelings of pain and increase our vitality.

This is obviously a good thing for well adjusted people in our day to day lives but extremely important, and I would say **vital** for those who are dealing with what can sometimes be **debilitating** forms of psychological conditions like negative stress, anxiety or depression.

Now, Gratitude also has a social aspect to it -
Even viewing people feeling grateful, like a feel good video on social media can increase those happy feelings,
Remember Oprah yelling to her audience - "you get a car, and you get a car, and you get a car!"?

That one moment on her show became a classic memory years ago for that very reason - and it still makes many of us smile today due to the great feeling of shocking generosity that was seen throughout the country that day.

Although various steps towards practicing gratitude can be simple, for people dealing with trauma, stressful situations, grief and even these life challenges during a pandemic, even feeling like smiling or trying to be calm can be a real challenge, so there is some real inner work, necessary to achieve that space, and that's where I'd like to share with you how to cultivate a GRATEFUL MINDSET and that STARTS WITH AWARENESS AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

These are two states of mind that are really important to realize for ourselves when we're finding it hard to deal with the day, so I want to give you an example.

Some people may at first think of personal accountability as taking responsibility for things out of their control or for the way other's respond to them. That is actually the opposite of what it means in this situation.

Understanding that without recognizing who We Are away from others in our environment means we can actually take on the persona and reactivity of some of the people with strong personalities that are in our day-to-day space.

So for an example, I invite you to think about the people who are in your life - those at home or at work, and it may be helpful to write a list of the people you spend the most time with and then take a moment to think about their personality and the power they have in your life.

Now -

Do you ever find yourself using their verbiage or reacting in a way that's similar to them simply because you find them in your presence often enough to pick up those habits? Some of the easiest things to pick up can at times be the most difficult to notice until it pops out of our mouths. - When you find yourself frustrated, short-tempered, or even yelling at the drivers around you, ask yourself why you're responding the exact way you are - the names or expletives you use and notice where you heard them before - and then make a **conscious commitment** to change those words and behaviors.

It's a great time to recognize that the person in the car that's going slower than you'd like may have a very good reason such as seeing something you don't, or they may be less experienced - but whatever their reasoning, you have a moment when you can be grateful they responded in their own way to keep you both safe on the road.

Or you may be grateful that you're a better **and more patient driver!**

Whether you consider yourself an analytical person or a predominantly emotional person, the steps are the same.

In today's society we have reached a unique and challenging space. Our connection to what's happening in our households, neighborhoods, cities or townships, States, country, and around the world are literally equal.

We often naturally check in with our feelings before we answer a call, deciding whether we want to speak to that person on the other end of the line at that particular moment - so that's what we can train ourselves to do before we go online or listen to the news. be really aware of how we are feeling at that given moment in order to stay strong and positive.

We can be bombarded at any time with information on any given subject from any of these environments and quite often they can contain really negatively charged information as well as good things, so first of all, it really important to be aware of your emotions and the amount of stress your feeling in your physical body when your going online or listening to tv or radio.

That first check-in or moment of awareness helps us determine our patterns of behavior, including what we look at and where we thoughtlessly click, and noticing our personal perspectives when we're interacting online is how we paint the picture of our reality. SO, *whether* we find positive meme's, editorials we solidly agree with or complete dissension to something, it's how much of our energy we focus on that is what creates our perspective of life and our feelings of security and confidence which in turn creates our mindset, our thought processes, and therefore the chemicals released in our system that support our positive or negative feelings which in turn create the chemicals released from our brains and endocrine systems, **and again**, it's these chemicals, along with **our subconscious memory** that are what we ultimately react from when we find ourselves in a given situation.

So as I said, the process toward and maintaining a grateful mind is simple, but not always easy when we find ourselves stressed out, depressed, anxious, or just downright angry at whatever our circumstances are.

The next concept important to consciously creating a Gratitude practice is the POWER OF RIGHT NOW.

you may heard the term, "There's no time like the present", but I would ask you to consider the fact that there is no time BUT THE PRESENT.

For the most part, gratitude is about fixing things right now, and then maintaining that perspective and feeling.

If you are dealing with grief or trauma, that situation really is in the past, though our brains can ruminate and keep us stuck in those emotions. AND Some of those things CAN be difficult to let go or heal.

When we're grieving, or we've been negatively triggered by a sub-conscious memory, it can be next to impossible to find gratitude in for instance the death of a loved one, or finding out that your child has been abused in some way.

Those things can't be taken back - so resentment over something you had no control over and the pain of a betrayal or physical trauma aren't necessarily dealt with in this way - those things require other means of healing, but holding on to the realization and awareness that you are, in this moment, at the very least safe, and your survival needs in this moment are being met, - this is where that seed of gratitude can begin to take hold and grow and therefore establish the chemicals in your body as well as stop the process of the *stress* chemicals long enough and consistently enough to shut off the reactive mind and gain control over the triggers that spiral that person into a negative mindset.

So when a person becomes calmly aware of being in the current moment, the conscious mind can now help to reframe the story.

So we're at that point that our minds are more open, and our perception is elevated to seeing more of the big picture of a given situation. This is where our defenses can come down enough to actually have a heartfelt response. Again, for normally functioning people, these steps may seem unnecessary, but becoming aware of those subconscious triggers from traumas is vital for some, and just plain enlightening for others.

So here's the fun part:
(See list of actions at the beginning of the handout)

Certainly there are many other ways to cultivate healthy gratitude, and I'd love to hear from all of you on your thoughts, ideas, and if you try and succeed with any of the projects and ideas here today. Feel free to reach out and I'll be sure to answer. Thank you - and I TRULY APPRECIATE YOUR TIME!

Afterthought:

Made In God's Image

One of the things that I've noticed that isn't always addressed is that people with religious backgrounds, it doesn't matter which one, have been taught the understanding that we are created in God's image. That may be true, however with that comes the idea that God is a perfect being and therefore we have this equation that doesn't stand up because none of us can really perceive ourselves as perfect. The dichotomy that that creates alone can be a subconscious stress because we are hunting for a place in ourselves that is perfect and in this reality that's just not going to happen. So how do we come to a place of satisfaction within ourselves if there's this consistent guilt or original sin that we bring with us we have to place our faith or trust on something that's out there and unseen. Whether or not that particular concept is a truth it does create a conflict

within the subconscious mind if you're really believing in that faith, and oftentimes a child or someone who hasn't really taken the time to think about that concept ends up with a trigger response of constantly feeling like they're never going to approach a good enough life. Outward reactions to that can be criticizing those around us, self-loathing, depression and other negative processes that go on without that individual actually being aware of it.