



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 60: Giving Thanks Is Good For You

2,466 words of content featuring **16** powerful practices and lots of stuff to make you think. Approximate reading time required: **9.86** minutes. And isn't your Happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the Principles of Happiness and Positive Emotion in your life and work. SPREAD THE WORD: Please forward to a friend who needs more Happiness.

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I. GIVING THANKS IS GOOD FOR YOU

The American Thanksgiving holiday is upon us, and while retail stores across the country prepare to battle for your (tightly-held) dollars, I invite you to spend a few minutes reflecting on the original meaning of the holiday: Giving Thanks.

Gratitude (grat-i-tood), noun: *the quality of being warmly or deeply appreciative of kindness or benefits received; thankfulness.*



Gratitude Symbol

Gratitude is the most powerful of all the positive emotions, forming a solid foundation for experiencing more happiness, optimism, hope, and joy. Practiced regularly, gratitude shapes your worldview toward noticing abundance versus scarcity, since it focuses on what you Have versus what you Lack. When you speak with others about what you are grateful for, you bring positive energy to that conversation. Grateful people make better friends, parents, coworkers, and leaders. Finally, when you practice gratitude, you will feel more content with the world, no matter what your current state (even unemployed!).

Think it, Feel it, Do it.

If you want to learn the piano, you must practice, practice, practice. The same is true of emotional states. To tap the power of thankfulness, create an intentional practice of Gratitude. What would that look like for you? Some conditions to consider:

- **Daily.** Make it something you do at least 5x/week to hone your skill and awareness.
- **Portable.** Create a practice you can take with you when you travel.
- **Measurable.** It should be specific enough that you can say, “yes I did it today” or not.
- **Consistent.** While you can vary the ways you strengthen your gratitude muscle, try to have one or two core practices you do regularly.
- **Possible.** Keep your practice small enough that it can always fit into your life.

Ten Gratitude Activities

Some are simple, some complex; some are high-tech, low-tech, visual, verbal, or physical. There is no 'perfect' practice, so create one that works for you. Here are practices used by others (or me) that I know have worked.

1. **Keep a Gratitude Journal.** This is the most basic and powerful practice in all of Positive Psychology. I can't remember a single text on happiness published in the past seven years that does not put this at the top of the list. Every day, write down three blessings from the past 24 hours. Pencil and paper or online journal work equally well.
2. **Offer a Prayer of Thanks.** Robert Emmons, in his 2007 book, "thanks!" says that 70% of people surveyed (all religions combined) pray daily. Those who say 'thank you' more often than 'please give me....' experience higher life satisfaction.
3. **Write a Note/Email.** Every day, let a person in your life know you are grateful for them, *and why*. Even if you only honor workdays, in a year you'll have sent 250 notes.
4. **Post one gratitude Tweet each day.** There's even a community of thankfulness on Twitter – use hashmark [#thankfulfor](#).
5. **Share With Someone.** As you head to bed each night, share one thing you appreciate about your partner (or your child).
6. **Create a Gratitude List.** Start with a list of 25-50 things for which you are grateful. Whenever you think of something new, add it to the list. Pull the list out and read it whenever you feel down, sad, or ungrateful, for a quick pick-me-up.
7. **Say a Gratitude Mantra.** One woman stands in front of her full-length mirror each day and says, out loud, "Happy am I. Healthy and strong am I. Grateful am I. Holy am I."
8. **Three Square Meals.** A good friend prays before every meal and says three things he is grateful for since his last meal (and he is the most grateful person I know!)
9. **Create a Body of Gratitude.** This is one of mine. With feet flat on the ground, I pull my shoulders back and my head up, open my palms toward the person I am facing, and take a deep breath. Every time I answer a ringing phone, I take two seconds to shift into this body and imagine my heart opening as I breathe in and say, "good day!"
10. **Keep a Gratitude file.** Every time you receive a thank you note, place it in your file. In email, create a folder to store these. When you are having a bad day open the file and, as you read, feel the warmth of other people's gratefulness wash over you.

Deepen Your Practice: Notice the Basics

I recently led a diversity program for a high-school junior class, and used "The World as 100 People" info (see <http://miniature-earth.com/> for an eye-opening look at human statistics). I was reminded that as a middle class American I am incredibly blessed. I have a roof over my head, I have access to clean water and sanitation (43% of humans do not have that basic need met), I

have an advanced education (a rare privilege in most of the world), and I have food on my table every day (not true for 37 out of every 100 people, including many in America).

When was the last time you broke bread and gave thanks for the fact that when you turn the faucet, clear water emerges? Or that your lights go on when you flip the switch? Or that you are able to live without fear of being assassinated in your home?

What about your Challenges?

You probably don't spend much time giving thanks for difficult co-workers, tough teachers, your failures, or past suffering. Yet everything in your life that stretched you into the 'dark side' can help you feel grateful today. When you've survived tough times, you have a starker contrast against which to rate your good times, plus you know you have the strength to survive.

For example, when my youngest brother died of leukemia, I emerged from a terrible experience with a much deeper appreciation for life. While Gene was my boss, I assessed I was living Hell On Earth; yet I've found it easier to appreciate every subsequent boss or client, knowing that -- no matter how awful -- they aren't as evil as Gene (truly)!

In what ways might you be grateful to your hardships and challenges? How have they supported your growth or learning? How have your past bad times helped you appreciate today?

"Everything that happens to us has a blessing built into it." ~Dr. Wayne Dyer

Do This For Yourself (and Your Family)

This Thanksgiving, when your family and/or friends are gathered at table, invite them into the spirit of Giving Thanks with one of the following:

Easy – Say One Thing

Before dinner, ask each person at the table to say out loud one thing for which they are grateful. To keep it real, invite them to use the Because Test, for example: "I am grateful for _____ because _____."

Medium – Write Ten Things

Lay a sheet of paper at each place, and invite everyone to write down ten things for which they feel grateful. Ask people to share three out loud.

Kick it up a notch: every item on the list should pass the Because Test.

Two notches up: challenge them to write down 25 items!

Difficult – Get Personal (payoff if it works: priceless)

As each person arrives, hand him or her a marker and five 3x5 index cards (have more available if needed). Before and during dinner, they will write out each card to other individuals present at dinner, expressing thanks for something they've done or been. Remind people to think about the 'little stuff' as well as the obvious. After dinner, invite everyone to go to the other person(s), read their card aloud, then hand them the card.

Tips: You do the first reading, to model it (stand next to and face the person). *Hugs are optional.* Have tissues ready. *As host, have yours pre-written.* Stretch yourself to cover the 'less lovable' family members, so everyone will receive at least one card. *Remind all*



Remember: Leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader who spends more time in Gratitude than in assessment. The people around you will rise to your level of expectation, and when you expect them to do well, they will rarely disappoint you!

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III. BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Last month I wrote about Charlie Watson’s rule (“I should have had more fun”) and how important it is that you don’t wait until you’re too old, too sick, facing your mortality, or trapped by crisis to have some fun. #1 on my list of inexpensive ideas was **Paint your front door.**

I want you to know that I practice what I preach. After a few conversations about color, Cheryl and I agreed on a bright green (Sherwin Williams Shamrock #6454). Here’s the before and after versions of our front door:



Every time I enter my house, the front door makes me smile. 😊

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IV. COMMERCE DIVISION – SEEKING SECRETS

So, one of my marketing mentors says to me, “Jim, stop telling me about all these ideas for new products. Tell me what you already have that’s 80% complete. Don’t get distracted by trying to finish anything – just make a list.”

And what a list! In the category of “almost-but-not-quite-finished” I have over three dozen articles, five tips books, two e-books, a seven-session audio program on leadership, a couple of short videos, and...only one (1) completed, available-for-sale product, which is the fabulous book I published five months ago.

Clearly, I need more perseverance in my emotional wardrobe, to move me from ideation to completion. I’ve taken small steps in that direction, most recently partnering with a colleague to move my Leadership Series of audio lessons to completion within the next four weeks. This is exciting!



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**Happiness is a decision, not an event.
How will YOU decide today?**

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