



UP NEXT MONTH

The Value of Campaigns



GETTING GOOD AT GRATITUDE

Gratitude — appreciating the goodness in life — is a virtue that can be cultivated. By anyone.

At any age. Consider the following activities that can help boost daily gratitude and enhance health:

- **List the five things you're most appreciative of each morning.** This daily reminder can provide an optimism boost on even the worst days.

- **Practice personal, positive affirmations.** Affirmations re-wire the brain, raising the level of feel-good hormones and helping maintain positivity to reach goals. Gratitude can grow from achieving desired actions.

- **Reframe difficult situations.** Turn difficult situations into positive experiences by looking at the benefits to be gained.

For gratitude journaling tips from gratitude-science expert Robert Emons, visit bit.ly/tips-gratitude-journal.



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Usher Gratitude into the New Year

Thankfulness offers health benefits to board members and the nonprofits they serve

by Cassandra Larsen and Deborah Whitehurst

▶ The year is drawing to a close — a time of reflection for individuals and organizations alike. With that reflection often come resolutions: to focus on health, to raise more fundraising dollars, to make a greater impact on the lives of others.

But what about “to be more grateful”? It’s not generally at the top of the resolution list. Science, however, is proving that a focus on gratitude could be the answer to improved personal health — and it just might have a trickle-down effect on fundraising success.

It’s no surprise that grateful people tend to see the world in a more positive light, noticing and appreciating the good over the bad. Their positivity can ward off depression, lead to better sleep and, simultaneously, reduce anxiety and stress, thus improving overall health. But there’s even more to it than the “grateful = optimistic = healthy” equation.

Brain scan studies conducted by researchers at Indiana University illustrate that particular areas of the brain light up when associated with gratitude tasks such as keeping a gratitude diary or writing thank-you letters. Those same areas of gray matter remain active even months after the task is complete, suggesting that, with practice, the mind can become conditioned to experience the enhanced feelings of well-being resulting from gratitude.

What’s more, feelings of thankfulness can have a long-lasting, spiral effect. When individuals feel more thankful, they more often act with gratitude toward others, causing *them* gratefulness.

So what does gratitude mean to a nonprofit, its board members, its volunteers and its donors? “People who live gratefully feel a greater sense of social responsibility and may be better citizens,” says Jodi Swanson, Ph.D., faculty member in the Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics at Arizona



State University. “They feel more of a sense of connection with others and operate with a clearer purpose in life and a healthy sense of independence.” Organizations that are immersed in a constant state of thankfulness — and are governed by independent, socially motivated, grateful leaders — are, therefore, at an advantage over competitors. They’re more connected, positive and productive.

“Gratitude releases dopamine in the brain, which promotes a sense of wellbeing, optimism and physical health,” says Swanson. “In a nonprofit, these might translate to increased productivity, decision-making skills and problem-solving acuity.” Grateful board members, then, bolster not only their own health, but the health of the nonprofits they serve. Why not start a new year’s tradition and add “gratitude” to the resolution list? ■

Thankfulness: A Year-Round Goal

To keep their nonprofits grateful year-round, board members can:

- **Instill hope and optimism whenever possible.** “Whether discussing new projects, new directions, or even hashing through lessons learned from mistakes, optimism builds a gratitude-rich environment and social space, given that gratitude can be defined as a worldview, a lifestyle or a way of operating,” says Swanson.

- **Emphasize and participate in employee recognition.** “Regularly recognizing and appreciating all that employees and volunteers do can result in increased engagement, motivation and retention, as well as enhanced workplace relationships,” says Swanson. And personalize those grateful gestures: Would the employee most appreciate a handwritten note of gratitude, a personal visit or acknowledgement in a public setting? Leaders who express and value gratitude often inspire similar virtues throughout the organization.

- **Hand-write donor thank-you notes.** This time-honored act of expressing gratitude makes both the thank-you writer and

recipient feel good. Happy, acknowledged donors give again and feel a heightened connection to the nonprofit.

- **Listen with an open mind.** To express gratefulness means respecting others’ opinions. Leaders who thank volunteers or employees, but fail to consider their feedback, are seen as disingenuous.

- **Jot notes in a gratitude journal one to two times per week.** Journals offer an opportunity for reflection and help maintain greater optimism about the future. “Self-reflection helps individuals make meaning of their experiences and helps solidify events, people and places into useful tools for personal growth,” says Swanson. Entries can be brief and range widely — from “a good cup of coffee this morning” to “a nice compliment from a co-worker” to more substantial and overarching, such as “sharing time with friends.” The idea is to compile visual reminders of things to be thankful for.



Gratitude is good for the heart. Paul Mills, professor of family medicine and public health at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, studied patients with heart damage and discovered those who kept daily gratitude journals experienced decreased inflammation and improved heart rhythm.



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