



9 photo

What do you have to be thankful for this Thanksgiving? Research shows that grateful people lead happier, more productive lives.

The power of gratitude

"The single biggest way to turbocharge your joy is to make a 'gratitude' visit. That means writing a testimonial thanking someone and then visiting that person to read him or her the letter."

— Dr. Martin Seligman

In the last 10 years, psychologists in the new arena of positive psychology have discovered a great deal about gratitude. They've created gratitude scales, figured out the correlation between gratitude and health and researched how gratitude is connected to happiness.

The bottom line is this: people who experience high levels of gratitude in life are happier and healthier (Park et al., 2004). According to Watkins (2004), gratitude enables us to reject aspects of the "hedonistic treadmill" where we need to buy more stuff to feel better about ourselves. Taking time to notice the good things in your life is likely to lead to greater satisfaction with life.

If you've paid attention, you'll realize that some are already employing this research.

Writing "thank you" on your dinner bill translates into bigger tips. Writing your employees notes of appreciation translates into better employee-employer relationships.

Organizations are beginning to take employee recognition for success very seriously.

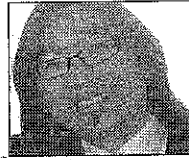
Did you know that considering your "gratitudes" before bed translates into a better sleep (Wood et al., 2009)?

We all know that sleep can mean the difference between a tough day and a great day.

The thoughts you have before you sleep are called "pre-sleep cognitions." Researchers (Wood et al., 2009) who study sleep have learned that pre-sleep cognitions predict the quality of your sleep: "when falling asleep, grateful people are less likely to think negative and worrying thoughts, and more likely to think positive thoughts."

In another study (Wood et al., 2007), the relationships between gratitude and perceived social support, stress and depression were examined. Guess what? Gratitude seems to foster social support and protect people from stress and depression.

This is a very important finding. The authors conclude that gratitude is not a function of personality. In short, you can learn to be more grateful and receive the big-time benefits.



S T A N
CHUNG
Global Citizen

Another study (Froh et al., 2009) showed that youths low in "positive affect" had greater positive affect after writing a letter to someone that they were grateful for and then delivering it to them in person.

The findings indicate that the letter writing-delivery exercises worked better than simply writing a daily gratitude journal.

Speaking of the journal, the daily gratitude journal kept on a weekly basis caused study participants to report fewer physical symptoms. People felt better about their lives as a whole and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to those who recorded hassles or neutral life events.

A related benefit was that gratitude lists enable people to be more likely to make progress toward their personal goals.

In short, gratitude works.

What are some gratitude interventions that you can try?

Keep a gratitude journal.

Be kind and forgiving on the road.

Write a note to someone you are grateful for and deliver it in person.

As your head hits the pillow, think of five things you're grateful for.

Ask a child regularly what he/she is grateful for.

Produce a piece of art about gratitude. Write a song, take a photograph, draft a poem.

Pay forward a good deed. Do something kind without any expectation of reward.

Share the happiest moment of the day at the evening meal.

Send an email or postcard to someone you are grateful for.

Bring gratitude to your pain, sadness and longing.

We can all fall under the trap of negative thinking. We can focus on the things we don't have. We can ask why we don't feel great. We

can focus on dissatisfaction, disease, heartache and unhappiness.

It's all too easy.

But we know that focusing this way leads to more stress, more discontent and more physical woes.

We have seen what bitterness and anger can do to others. And yet we cling to scarcity instead of abundance. We cling to competition instead of co-operation. We cling to our weaknesses instead of our strengths.

Giving thanks is a ritual or habit that can literally save your life. The effects of turning our attention to gratitude can be enormous.

Changing your thought patterns will change how you feel and how people feel about you.

And it's free.

It requires only a little practice. Nobody will come to your home. You don't have to send me money.

You have literally nothing to lose, except the bad stuff.

I used to give very little attention to gratitude. I had to read the many studies done by serious scholars to discover that gratitude can change your life probably quicker than any potion, preacher or pharmaceutical.

I am thankful for so many things: for my life, my family and friends, my readers, my colleagues, the beauty of all things and for the ability to feel. I'm also grateful to those who care about those things that I don't care about. I am grateful for all those who see their actions as contributing to the kind of planet we live on. We need all kinds of global citizens.

Gratitude doesn't mean we stop our work as change agents; it doesn't mean we give up trying to work together to make the world a more connected and compassionate place.

Gratitude, in a sense, can help make positive change possible because it makes you easier and more fun to work with.

At this moment, speak these simple words: I am thankful.

Say these words at dinner, but also say them before you go to bed and say them when you feel your worst. And take notice, if you can, of the power of gratitude to change and perhaps revolutionize your life.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Stan Chung is a writer and associate dean of arts and foundational programs at Okanagan College. Contact him at stanchung@gmail.com.