

## Sharpen Your Tools

*Lisa Ryan*

### Look on the Bright Side

#### Staying positive in a negative world

Ah, so much to do; so little time to do it. Life would be so much easier if you actually heard from people when things were going great. Unfortunately, most of the time, you only hear from others when something is wrong, something is broken or something needs to be taken care of right away.

How do you keep a positive attitude with so much negativity surrounding you? Glad you asked!

Today we are going to explore the benefits when you S.H.O.W. appreciation. I'm one of those people who love acronyms, and today we'll look at the ideas in S.H.O.W.: self, health, others and wealth. First, we'll consider "self" and see how gratitude changes our perspective. Then we'll review the "health" benefits of appreciation. Next, we'll contemplate the impact of thankfulness on our relationships with "others." Finally, we'll explore the effect on our "wealth," and how gratitude affects the work environment.

#### It Starts with Self

First is the self. It really is all about you. The best action you can take, today, is to start a gratitude journal. Don't worry; you don't need to journal for two hours a day. Simply taking a few minutes each day to write down a few things you are thankful for will do wonders for your attitude.

You may choose to journal first thing in the morning. That way, it is more likely to get done, and it also gives you the opportunity to start your day on a positive note. You can also journal in advance of an event. For example, this morning I wrote, "I am so thankful that I completed my article for RFMA today."

Or, you may choose to journal at night. An evening practice gives you the opportunity to review your day and notice what went well. Even if you had the worst day on the planet, when you make your self find three "wins" for the day, it changes your mood— and, as an added bonus, helps you sleep better.

#### Health Benefits

What are some of the health benefits of appreciation? Robert Emmons, Ph.D., a professor at the University of California at Davis, found that people who regularly practice being grateful are 25 percent happier than those who don't. They complain less often. They exercise, on average, an hour and a half more per week than others. They are more optimistic, energetic, happy and joyful. When he interviewed people associated with his "gratitude group" to see if they noticed a difference in

their friends who were journaling, they did. The associates found their gracious colleagues to be more emotionally available and nicer to be around.

Other studies confirm Dr. Emmons' findings. The Institute of HeartMath compared the effects of appreciation and frustration on heart beats. They found that appreciation causes the heart to beat more rhythmically and evenly than when we are frustrated. HeartMath researchers also studied the effects of anger and compassion on the immune system. They found that every five minutes you spend in anger reduces the efficiency of your immune system for up to six hours. Those same five minutes spent in compassion, however, elevates the performance of the immune system for also six hours.

Are you starting to see how taking the time to look for the good each day is beneficial? Good, because there are two more concepts to ponder.

### Interacting with Others

The "O " reveals how thankfulness can impact our relationships with others. We assume that the people in our lives know how much we love and appreciate them. What I have found is that 100 percent of the people in my life have failed Mind Reading 101. How often do you openly express your gratitude to the important people in your life?

Let me ask you a question: When do you hear the nicest things about a person? It's during their eulogy, isn't it? There's "John," lying flat out, and you hear his loved ones extolling his virtues. But did those same people share with "John" how they felt about him while he was still on the planet? Maybe, maybe not. I believe it should be illegal to say something during a eulogy that we did not say to that person while he or she was still on Earth.

### Attracting Wealth

The "W " is for wealth. Let's look at why it's important to bring these concepts into your workplace. The Gallup organization finds that only about 30 percent of employees are "actively engaged" at work. These are the team members who are in the flow, are a joy to work with, have connections and are committed to the workplace. They bring more value than you are paying them.

Fifty percent of employees are "engaged," meaning they are doing enough work so they don't get fired, and you are paying them enough so they don't quit. It's an even balance. The other 20 percent of staff members are "actively disengaged." These are the poisonous, toxic people who suck the life out of your organization. So what can you do to move the "engaged" into the "actively engaged" column and the "actively disengaged" employees, at least, into the "engaged" section, so they stop costing you money? By showing sincere appreciation.

### Looking for Excellence

By starting your own gratitude practice, you'll find it easier and simpler to find the good in your life. Now, it's time to begin consciously looking for what's excellent in others.

Here are three ways you can do that:

**Be Looking:** Start catching people doing things right. One of my audience members shared, "When I do something wrong, I get recognized 100 percent of the time. When I do something well, it's rare than anyone says anything." As Mother Teresa said, "We are more starved for appreciation than we are for bread." This is equally true in the workplace.

**Be Specific:** What gets recognized, gets repeated. Instead of saying, "Hey, great job!" let your employee know the details of what was so terrific about their work. You're used to recognizing your rock stars; consider acknowledging your "Steady Eddies"—those who don't necessarily shine in the spotlight, but are the people who you can always depend on to do a nice job.

**Be Present:** When someone comes to talk to you, put down the cellphone, stop typing the email and make eye contact. Through your actions, let that person see that you care about them and their issue. If you are in crunch time, let the person know you literally have "one minute" and ask, "Can we talk about this at 4:30 when I can give you my full attention?" Your employees want to know they matter.

**Find the Positive**

To sum it all up, here's how you can find the positive in a negative world:

**Self:** Keep a gratitude journal. Consciously look for the good in your life and with others every day.

**Health:** Choose positive emotions. Stop letting other people live "rent-free" in your head. Like in the movie "Frozen," let it go!

**Others:** Share positive feedback verbally and in writing. By giving someone a handwritten note, you are giving them tangible evidence of your appreciation that they can refer to when they need a pick-me-up.

**Wealth:** Focus on creating a culture of appreciation in our workplace. There are many ways to do this; consider your culture and what your employees like. Ask them for feedback, listen and take action on what they tell you.

When you S.H.O.W. appreciation, you'll find there's a lot more than you may have expected to keep you happy, healthy and successful in business and in life.

Lisa Ryan is an award-winning speaker and bestselling author. She is a nationally recognized gratitude expert who works with organizations to keep their top talent and best clients from becoming someone else's. She has written eight books, co-stars in two movies and is President of the National Speakers Association, Ohio Chapter. Learn more at [www.grategy.com](http://www.grategy.com).