

Insights from a Year of Daily 'Gratitude Journal' Entries

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We are approaching Thanksgiving, which means that Christmas is coming fast! It's a special time of year for pausing and feeling grateful for our many blessings!

In October of 1863, during our bloody civil war, Abraham Lincoln issued an executive proclamation for a national day of Thanksgiving, to be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November. It was not a new concept, as a day set aside for giving thanks had been celebrated in a variety of locations for years. Lincoln and many others hoped that an officially sanctioned NATIONAL holiday would contribute to restoring peace to the suffering disunited states.

As we approach Thanksgiving this year, would you be willing to experiment with setting aside a small amount of time EVERY day to express your gratitude for some unique aspect of your life? I started doing that a little over a year ago. I was deeply grateful for the experiences in my life to that point--and for the opportunities that I imagined still lie ahead for me!

This article has two purposes. First and primary is to encourage you to start a gratitude journal and work to keep at it for a significant amount of time. The second purpose is to provide a report on what the experience has meant to me--the two key insights that a year of daily reflections has provided.

Long-time readers may recall a similar article from years ago, 2006 to be precise. (You can find "The Gratitude Journal Challenge" on my Article Archives--address below.) Every day for a month, I acknowledged five items in my life for which I was grateful. Identifying 155 items without repeating any was quite a challenge, yet I found it both doable and deeply enjoyable.

In this recent effort--begun ten years after the first experience--my intent was to identify one item a day for a year. I expected to write about half a page each day; most entries wound up being longer.

Now, let me advocate that you consider starting a gratitude journal with the guideline being whatever you define. You can do five a day for a month, one a day for a year, or anything else you so desire.

Would you like to start in a fun way? Gather family and friends to watch the classic Christmas film, "It's a Wonderful Life." As soon as the movie ends, invite everyone to share examples of gratitude, affirming each other with enhancements and additions.

As the energy wanes, announce your plan to start a gratitude journal, explaining your intentions. Ask others to consider doing the same, to include perhaps periodically sharing what each of you have highlighted, appreciating your gratitude together.

Now, let me share my two overarching observations from a year of daily contemplations. First is that we've all been blessed with an amazing abundance of gifts that we did not earn, yet we've quietly accepted and treat as if they are entitlements. This awareness resulted in another article you can find on my website, "I Don't Deserve This."

My second recurring source of gratitude includes the many friends and family members who have meant so much to me throughout my life. I'm considering sending a hard copy of this article in my Christmas cards this year, highlighting my appreciation for the recipients. I am deeply grateful for both the good times we've shared and the hard times during which we grew together!

If you choose to generate a gratitude journal, I welcome you sharing your dominant insights with me. Maybe you'll affirm these two. Maybe yours will be different. However, I can almost guarantee you that your daily outlook will be more positive than it is now.

That's the point I want to make as I close. Yes, I've shared two content items that kept coming up for me from my daily reflections. However, what's even more remarkable is that the process of daily focusing on blessings transforms over time from a challenge ("I can't think of what to record tonight!") to a contemplative choice ("Which one will I record tonight?").

I won't go so far as to say that "gratitude" becomes a habit. I will say that even in the most troubling of days, you'll pick out blessings for which you are appreciative. Will your resulting attitude be one filled with more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control? Give it a try and send me a note, telling me how it has worked for you. I can assure you in advance, I'll be grateful!

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