

The “Gratitude Journal” Challenge

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2006, published in the Houston Daily Journal on Thursday, November 16, 2006

Thanksgiving is just a week away. May I suggest you start considering very explicitly just exactly what causes you to be grateful?

A little over a month ago, I started a “gratitude journal.” I wish I could recall where I first learned of the idea, because I usually try to identify my sources. But I can tell you what stimulated me to actually begin the journal entries.

You may recall the 1997 book by Richard Carlson entitled Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff...and It’s All Small Stuff. A friend recommended his newest book, Easier Than You Think...The Small Changes That Add Up to a World of Difference, and I purchased it.

In the introduction, Carlson writes that “my goals and priorities have shifted as my life has unfolded; my sights are higher now. These past few years, I have spent much of my time exploring ways to lead a more meaningful life.”

All of us are getting older. Some of the leaders I support are nearing retirement. Some are just beginning their careers. I contend that no matter what our ages, we should set our sights higher as our lives unfold.

Carlson points out, “Our thoughts are the most powerful tools we have been given during this lifetime. We can use them to create joy, anticipation, excitement, fun, happiness, and peace. Of course, we can just as easily allow our thoughts to be self-destructive weapons.”

At about this point, I chose to start my gratitude journal. I figured it couldn’t hurt to identify five sources of gratitude a day. I wondered if it would increase my level of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. Would it enhance my commitment to serve others with the blessings I’ve been given?

It should be easy to identify five sources of gratitude in a day, right? But five different situations, every day for a month--without repeating any topics—could be a challenge.

When I started the journal, I knew I might write an article on this experience. I figured then that I might share what I had learned.

Now, however, I have a different idea. I challenge others to duplicate this experience. Obtain a blank book. For each day, write five sentences that begin with “I am grateful for....”

You may discover that as you progress, a single sentence is not enough. I found I wanted to expand my awareness of why I was grateful. In some cases, I wanted to describe the situation in more detail.

I also wanted to consider “So what? What will I do with that blessing that could provide some lasting benefit for someone else? Can I capitalize on that positive feeling to increase my service to others?”

Will you commit to preparing a “gratitude journal” over the next month? Will you commit to share with me and with the people you influence what you experience? Perhaps your initiative could stimulate people you touch to do the same thing, becoming more aware of the beneficial aspects of their lives.

I envision that you will multiply your insights as you stimulate and learn from each other. Consider gathering the members of your team and getting together in a month, jointly creating a debriefing session that is upbeat and encouraging to each other. I think you’ll find that most people do not take intentional time to reflect on and appreciate the events and accomplishments of their recent past.

That’s my challenge. If you choose to engage in this learning opportunity, please contact me!

Dennis Hooper is an Executive Coach, helping leaders build collaborative cultures and reliable systems. Contact him at (404)-575-3050 or e-mail to dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com.