

Gratitude--Appreciating the Past Year

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If you thought about it, could you be overcome with gratitude for what the past year has delivered? Imagine sitting down and enumerating the events, developments, and accomplishments for which you are grateful. Better yet, don't just think about it. Commit a little bit of time and actually do it!

Consider creating two lists, one for your personal life and one for the team you lead at work. You might ask curiously, "What will I do with the lists that I generate?" If you are as productive as I expect, you'll want to engage some very special people, asking them to enjoy your observations. They'll probably instinctively offer some additional items. Gratefully add them to your list.

Here's what I speculate will happen when you start. For the first three minutes, you'll look at the blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer screen) and think, "My mind is empty. What have I done over the past year?" Then something that happened recently will occur to you and you'll wonder, "Does that qualify?" Go ahead and write it down--it's at least a start, and you can prioritize later.

The next item won't take as long. It will be bigger, and it won't be as recent. Then you'll think of another, and another. and then for a while you won't be able to write as quickly as you can think.

When you start to slow down, you'll reach a point where you're ready to do one of two things. One possibility is to set the list aside for a few days, allowing your subconscious mind to deliver up additional items. Add your new recollections as they present themselves.

A second alternative is to find someone in close relationship with you and engage him or her. Explain what you've been doing, then ask for some thoughts. The person may want you to share what you've generated already. Offer just a few of your ideas, and then ask the other person to chime in when the concept is clear. Once your colleague starts offering ideas, they will trigger additional remembrances for you. Capture all of them! Just keep the accumulation going.

In our society, we make a big deal of the beginning of a new year. I'm all for seeking improvement, but let's also celebrate what we've accomplished. If you've been a reader of my articles for a while, you know I typically ask two reflective questions. The first is, "What did we do well?" If you spend some time thinking about the answers to that question, you'll definitely generate some gratitude.

The other question is, "What could we do better in the future?" Simply asking that question invites all kinds of possible visions of what is possible in coming months and years.

A leader must repeatedly express optimism for the future of the organization. Why repeatedly? Because the vision does not currently exist in physical form. People can't touch it, smell it, or see it. The vision is simply a confident expression of an individual or organizational imagination.

However, current reality does exist. People dwell within its physical confines every day. You can't disguise the truth of what is. As the leader, you have to be blatantly honest about current reality. If you try to sugarcoat what exists in real time, people mistrust your other observations, too. Not good!

Current reality, however, exists because of a lot of work that people have contributed over the recent past. Hopefully, the effort they've expended and the results of their work have made it to your gratitude list. That's another reason you involve others--so you don't overlook their participation.

So, as you recount current reality, it's very appropriate to celebrate the victories of the past year. As you look to the future, take some intentional time to reflect on the blessings of the recent past. Sharing gratitude with those close to you, personally and professionally, enhances your mutual respect and stimulates greater interdependent collaboration in the future.

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