

Gratitude

“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

What is Gratitude?

The Oxford online dictionary provides this definition: the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

At Fair Shake, we believe that gratitude is a vital component to mental health, to engagement in community, and to feeling important and valued in society. Our “operating philosophy” – ubuntu – drives us to reflect on being grateful for every person in our life who has helped us become the person we are today, and knowing that we can evolve to become the person we want to be through even more learning from and through others.

Many thanks to those who have gone before us and lead the way to a greater understanding about ourselves so we are better able to create the life we wish to pursue! Many thanks for our ever-expanding minds that never stop learning, increasing our knowledge (about ourselves and about others) which, in turn, increases our capabilities!

We don’t stop with gratitude, we begin.

Reflections on Gratitude

by Terrell Hall (Fair Shake’s Outreach Manager)

As I sat in a cold dark place with nothing, I started to tap into my innate gifts and make the best of them. My focus was on my loved ones, life and health and I found myself as thankful as I’d ever been in my life. Thankful for strength of mind. Thankful for my relationships over the years – even the ones that impacted me negatively – because they all played a part in me becoming who I am. I also realized that those relationships were not just about me; they were about the other person as well. I found myself thankful that I have something to offer the world, just as we all do. These things can’t be taken away, and I will continuously be grateful for them.

I’ve learned that gratitude isn’t an action; it’s a lifestyle where you express your thankfulness for what life has given you. Gratitude includes being as thankful for the storm as for the sunshine. The storm provides an opportunity for growth that allows you to give back and help others through your experience, effecting change on a level greater than yourself.

My understanding of gratitude today has a lot to do with the most difficult times in my life when I just couldn’t keep my eyes open long enough to see what I had to be grateful for. Those tough experiences taught me more about myself than I think would have come about in any other fashion and have it truly resonate. The pain and turmoil inside forced me to do something and I didn’t always make the best decisions. This made me even more ungrateful. I had been through things that others had and not survived. I am grateful to be alive. I’m grateful for the lessons I’ve learned because others have also made them and did not grow from them. I don’t have to compare my life and gratitude to anyone else, I have a right to own my health and joy, and for that I am forever grateful. There is always something to be grateful regardless to what the moment holds. I am a better person largely due to some of my more difficult times in life.

This page is a great place to continue your journey of understanding gratitude and its effects.

Why Gratitude Is Good

Robert Emmons shares the effects of gratitude on physical health, on psychological well-being, and on our relationships with others. He is the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude. He is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, and the founding editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. We found this article on the *Greater Good in Action* website:

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good/

For more than a decade, I've been studying the effects of gratitude on physical health, on psychological well-being, and on our relationships with others.

In a series of studies, my colleagues and I have helped people systematically cultivate gratitude, usually by keeping a "gratitude journal" in which they regularly record the things for which they're grateful.

Gratitude journals and other gratitude practices often seem so simple and basic; in our studies, we often have people keep gratitude journals for just three weeks. And yet the results have been overwhelming. We've studied more than one thousand people, from ages eight to 80, and found that people who practice gratitude consistently report a host of benefits:

Psychological

- Higher levels of positive emotions
- More alert, alive, and awake
- More joy and pleasure
- More optimism and happiness

Social

- More helpful, generous, and compassionate
- More forgiving
- More outgoing
- Feel less lonely and isolated.

Physical

- Stronger immune systems
- Less bothered by aches and pains
- Lower blood pressure
- Exercise more and take better care of their health
- Sleep longer; feel more refreshed upon waking

The social benefits are especially significant here because, after all, gratitude is a social emotion. I see it as a relationship-strengthening emotion because it requires us to see how we've been supported and affirmed by other people.

Indeed, this cuts to the very heart of **my definition of gratitude**, which has two components. First, it's an **affirmation of goodness**. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received. This doesn't mean that life is perfect; it doesn't ignore complaints, burdens, and hassles. But when we look at life gratitude encourages us to identify some amount of goodness in our life.

The second part of gratitude is **figuring out where that goodness comes from**. We recognize the sources of this goodness as being outside of ourselves. It didn't stem from anything we necessarily did ourselves in which we might take pride. We can appreciate positive traits in ourselves, but I think true gratitude involves a humble dependence on others: We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives."

How to Practice Gratitude

From **Sonya Lyumbomirsky's** book, "*The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*"

Paths to gratitude. The particular means by which you go about counting your blessings will depend on your individual personality, goals, and needs. Instead of writing, some of you may choose a fixed time simply to contemplate each of your objects of gratitude and perhaps also to reflect on why you are grateful and how your life has been enriched. Others may choose to identify just one thing each day that they usually take for granted and that ordinarily goes unappreciated. Alternatively, some may want to acknowledge one ungrateful

thought per day (e.g., “my sister forgot my birthday”) and substitute a grateful one (e.g., “she’s always been there for me”).

Friends and family can also help foster your appreciation. One idea is to procure a gratitude partner with whom you can share your blessings list and who prompts and encourages you if you lose motivation or simply forget.

Another idea is to introduce a visitor to the things, people, and places that you love. Show off your comic book collection, your favorite park, or your favorite niece. Doing this will help you see the ordinary details of your life through another person’s eyes, affording you a fresh perspective and making you appreciate them as though you were experiencing them for the very first time.