

Practicing gratitude

Do you remember the last time you felt grateful for one of life's small pleasures? For example: a day of sunshine after weeks of rain; a perfectly ripe tomato from a local garden; a thoughtful comment from a colleague. These little gifts happen daily, but how often do we pause and feel grateful for them?

Complaining is easy, problems appear crystal clear, unwanted, and definitive: a cold in the summer, too many unanswered emails, not enough free time, weeks of rain, a difficult coworker - we can always find something that isn't right or ideal. Noticing the things in our lives that are going right is not as easy because good things don't shout and beg attention in quite the same way as the things we deem bad or negative. Good things can more easily go unnoticed or unrecognized in our busy problem-solving lives.

However, research shows that practicing **gratitude** has many positive effects on mental and physical health and overall well-being. In a recent study at the University of California, three groups of people were asked to make weekly logs of their experiences: one group focused on tracking negative things in their week, another on what they were grateful for or positive things, and a third was simply asked to make a note of something that affected them, without emphasizing whether it was good or bad. At the ten week mark, the people who recorded what they were grateful for were generally more optimistic they even exercised more and had fewer trips to the doctor.

Many such studies have been conducted on the effects of expressing gratitude. People who regularly express gratitude experience fewer symptoms of pain and take better care of their overall health. They are also happier and have less intrusive negative emotions such as envy, resentment, and regret. That's not all, here are some more of the amazing benefits of gratitude:

- Improves sleep
- Positively affects self-esteem and self-worth
- Increases resilience
- Boosts the immune system
- Boosts our careers
- Strengthens our emotions
- Makes us more optimistic

One tried and true way to increase your daily dose of gratitude is to **keep a gratitude journal**. This means that each day you record five things you are grateful for (doing it right when you wake up or before sleep tends to make it easier to stick to). Some things of course will repeat, big ones like having a roof over your head, a loving family, or a career you care about. Others might be smaller and only occur that day, like when a friend cooks you a good meal, or that you caught the bus just as it was pulling up. Big or small, paying attention to the little gifts that fall upon us every day will increase your awareness of them and you will begin to feel more grateful overall and reap the many benefits of saying thanks.

You can also **express gratitude aloud**. This means doing things like telling people what you appreciate about them and sharing positive stories and feelings from your day. It also means that when you feel the urge to complain or criticize make an effort to find something you are happy about to voice in its place.

Of course, this does not imply that you must put an end to telling people when something is wrong - it can be extremely beneficial to have the compassionate ear of a friend when times get tough. However, if you can eliminate some of your daily complaining and turn up the dial on gratitude, you are sure to bring more positivity and good health into your life and the lives of those around you.

Being yourself in a professional environment

In a professional environment, people are expected to behave in a certain way. For example:

- Meeting responsibilities and commitments.
- Treating people in a respectful manner.
- Being punctual.
- Accepting responsibility for one's actions.
- Showing initiative.
- Maintaining a professional demeanor.
- Acting with integrity and honesty.

However, being a professional also means being authentic by:

- Not pretending to be someone you're not.
- Not offering more than you can or something different than you feel comfortable with.
- Not pretending to know more (or less) than you know.
- Not hiding your age, culture, sexual orientation or circumstances.

The importance of authenticity

Allowing people to see the real you is essential to professional success. Here are just a few reasons why:

- Building relationships is part of doing business. That means letting people get to know you.
- When you're hiding aspects of your life or personality, people may perceive you as secretive or aloof.
- Struggling to be someone you're not can be stressful and take a toll on your physical and mental health.

Maintaining boundaries

Being yourself at work doesn't mean acting the same way you do when you're with your family or out with friends. The secret is to maintain boundaries. For example, don't overshare. It's one thing to reveal that you play hockey, but maybe not appropriate to give detailed accounts of your antics after the game. Here are some additional areas in which you should consider maintaining boundaries in a professional environment:

- Proclaiming your support of a particular political party or leader.
- Arguing or expressing your views on contentious or controversial issues unrelated to work.
- Displaying religious symbols at your desk or discussing religion.
- Talking about your personal problems or boasting about your accomplishments.
- Telling inappropriate stories or jokes.
- Swearing or bad language.
- Gossiping. If you need to vent or feel the need to share certain information, talk to someone outside the workplace – a friend or family member.

Being yourself in a professional environment means balancing expressing your individuality and conforming to corporate expectations.

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