



## Going from Thanksgiving to Thanksliving: Making Gratitude a Year-Long Habit

### Description

With the holiday season up, gratitude is likely on all of our minds. Yet gratitude doesn't have to be something we think about only once a year at Thanksgiving. It can be a way of living. We can practice gratefulness all year long — and when we do, our resulting gains in resiliency can be life-changing. In a recent Busy Leader's Podcast, I spoke about the power of gratitude with Harold Dawson Jr.—who is the president and CEO of The Dawson Company, a highly successful real estate company. (Click [here](#) to listen.) Harold shared with me some great insights.

Harold has seen his share of setbacks on the road to success. As I mentioned in a previous [column](#), he had a thriving business and then lost nearly everything in the 2008 economic crash. He spent the past decade rebuilding his business from scratch, and today it is better than ever. Over the years, Harold has come to learn that resilience is a way of life and that gratitude plays an important part. Resilience changes our mindset and enables us to handle all kinds of adversity. And it's not necessarily something we're born with—resilience can be built and learned. At a time when all of us are focused on greater resiliency, Harold says a gratitude practice is one of his favorite hacks for building resilience.

Here are some reasons gratitude is so powerful.

**It opens our minds to new possibilities.** A gratitude practice is about more than just feeling happy or seeing the glass as half full. Harold says focusing on the things we are grateful for trains us to stop seeing limitations and start seeing the limitless possibilities around us. It's about learning to approach life with a child's mind.

We all have baggage. This just means we bring our experiences with us to new situations. While in many cases this can be a good thing, it is sometimes described as items that can get in our way (like preconceptions or biases). At times, it can mean that our minds are already made up from the outset. So, whenever we receive new information, it's as if we are trying to pour it into the small end of a funnel, and it doesn't work. But coming from a place of mindful appreciation helps us see things in a new way—with a beginner's mind, the same way a child views the world. Suddenly we are able to flip the funnel. Then we can take in much more information and figure out what we want to use and what we don't want to use.

**It alleviates fear-based thinking and helps us focus on abundance.** Gratitude redirects our point of view away from a perspective of fear. It trains us to stop seeing lack and scarcity everywhere and to develop a perspective of abundance instead. From this vantage point, we can focus on the many good things around us. In a global pandemic, we can all benefit from making this powerful shift.

**It stops the perception that something is always wrong and breaks the cycle of complaining.**

We are trained to be critical thinkers, but the downside of critical perception is that it can lead to constant criticism and complaining. It feels so much better to approach life from a place of love, rather than constantly looking for problems and correcting and fixing things.

A gratitude practice helps us stop getting distracted by complaining and stay focused instead on opportunities. It prevents us from falling into a negative worldview and helps dissolve our pessimism. Here are a few of Harold's insights for putting gratitude into practice.

**Keep a gratitude journal.** Harold says a gratitude journal can help us tune in to the many good things we appreciate in our life. Sometimes people gloss over this suggestion because they don't realize how powerful this practice is.

Each day take a few moments to write and fill a page with 10 to 15 things you are grateful for. This might be conveniences that you've always taken for granted, like electricity, air, water, or a roof over your head. It might be professional and career wins. But it can also be things like spending time with your partner viewing a television show or watching a bird land outside your window. Really examine your life and dig deep.

**Try mindful meditation.** Mindfulness comes down to staying present and living in the here-and-now. The more mindful we are, the more likely we are to notice what's right. Staying mindful is tough to do, because we often get caught up thinking about the past or worrying about things that have not happened yet. Mindful meditation is a great way to break this pattern.

Even five to ten minutes a day can make a difference. Just sit quietly and focus on your breathing. When your mind wanders (and it will), gently guide your attention back to your breath in the present. Also try moving through some simple yoga poses, being sure to stay focused on the present moment while stretching and breathing.

**Practice Stoicism.** Stoicism is an ancient Greek philosophy based on a mindfulness and gratitude practice rolled into a kind of pragmatism and practicality. Stoics believe that "things happen," and instead of labeling whatever happens as good or bad, they see everything as challenges and opportunities. They accept things as they are, and instead of overreacting, they proceed accordingly with temperance and moderation.

Look at your own life and see if you can look at new happenings as challenges and opportunities. This paradigm shift will help you make the most of the hand you're dealt, both professionally and personally. And of course, if you look carefully, you can feel gratitude through it all.

What we all want and need during these challenging times is more emotional agility—to approach our inner experiences in a mindful and productive manner. This is the key to moving forward and becoming better people and leaders. Incorporating gratitude into life 365 days a year is a silver bullet for creating emotional agility. When we work on getting our inside right, our outside gets better as well.

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