

GRATITUDE RETREAT:

EXERCISES TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION

INTRODUCTION

It's easy to take things for granted, especially some things like a job (that you HAVE TO GO TO each day), or a family (that you ARE CONSTANTLY surrounded by), or even friends (that you HAVE KNOWN FOREVER), or anything similar. It's easy to forget why we are lucky for just about anything in our lives. That's why it's good to count our blessings, be thankful and show gratitude. This short retreat is intended to allow your group a little bit of time to reflect and think about gratitude in various aspects of your lives.

To get started:

- This retreat is intended for a small group (4-9) of coworkers, family, or friends, or any small collection of people that spend a consistent amount of time together. (If your workplace is larger than this, perhaps you can break into multiple groups.)
- Find a quiet room or space where the group can sit comfortably and have access to writing space and utensils.
- One person should play the role of facilitator and lead the group through the following exercises. A few of the exercises require minor preparation for the facilitator to do beforehand. The facilitator should begin by reading the following few quick facts about gratitude (feel free to add any of your own or others you can find).

Studies show that practicing gratitude can increase your happiness levels by about 25 percent. ([PsyBlog](#))

Positive emotions are associated with greater creativity, increased problem-solving ability, and greater overall success in life. ([PsyBlog](#))

An article on gratitude from Harvard Medical School states: "In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships." ([Huffpost Healthy Living](#))

Creating happiness is harder than you think – many of the activities you think will make you happier... do very little. "People are exposed to many messages that encourage them to believe that a change of weight, scent, hair, car, clothes, or many other aspects will produce a marked improvement in their happiness. Research suggests otherwise, with a warning: Nothing that you focus on will make as much difference as you think. On the other hand, creating happiness can be easier than you ever imagined – many of the activities you ignore, like cultivating gratitude, do very much even with little effort."

– Daniel Kahneman, founder of Behavioral Economics ([HappierHuman.com](#))

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GRATITUDE IN OUR LIVES (GROUP READ)

(PREPARATION: Write out quotes on small pieces of paper and put them in a bowl/basket.)

As a beginning ice-breaker to facilitate sharing, this exercise involves each participant pulling a quote about gratitude out of a basket and reading it aloud. Here are a few starter quotes from various sources. You will need to add a few more (or use different ones), depending on the size of your group:

Gracious God, in the busy-ness of our days, we sometimes forget to stop to thank you for all that is good in our lives.

Our blessings are many and our hearts filled with gratefulness for the gift of living, for the ability to love and be loved, for the opportunity to see the everyday wonders of creation, for sleep and water, for a mind that thinks and a body that feels.

We thank you, too, for those things in our lives that are less than we would hope them to be. Things that seem challenging, unfair, or difficult. When our hearts feel stretched and empty, and pools of tears form in our weary eyes, still we rejoice that you are as near to us as our next breaths and that in the midst of turbulence, we are growing and learning.

In the silence of our souls, we thank you most of all for your unconditional and eternal love.

Amen. — [from Prayers for Living](#)

To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything He has given us—and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him.

Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.

— Thomas Merton

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour, adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

— *Pied Beauty* by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful.

— Buddha

Be grateful you're not in the forest in France, where the average young person just hasn't a chance, to escape from the perilous pants eating plants, But your pants are safe, you're a fortunate guy, you ought to be shouting how lucky am I.

— Dr. Seuss

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APPRECIATION EXERCISE

(PREPARATION: Print out a blank “Appreciation List” (Exercise 1 below) for each person in the group.)

One of the first ways to begin appreciating (big and small) things in your life is to write them down. Everyone should take a few minutes to fill out the blank spaces on this sheet. Once everyone has completed it, participants can take turns sharing some thoughts or revelations they’ve had now that they’ve taken time to think about and list what they appreciate. Everyone should be encouraged to take their list with them to hang up at the office or at home so they can refer to it from time to time when they feel moments of “ungratefulness” coming on.

SPELLING OUT GRATEFUL

(PREPARATION: Print out a “Spelling Out G-R-A-T-E-F-U-L” sheet (Exercise 2 below) for each person in the group. Also, feel free to create your own, replacing the word “Grateful” with something more specific to your group. [i.e., when we did this at a group work retreat, we used the word B-U-S-T-E-D-H-A-L-O].)

This is a fun exercise/game, similar to Scattergories, which you can turn into a quick competition if your group is up for it. Everyone is given 2-3 minutes to write out things they are grateful for that begin with the letters that spell out the word G-R-A-T-E-F-U-L (it works best if they’re given a specific topic about what they’re grateful for, i.e. grateful about the workplace; grateful about their family; etc. Once everyone has finished, go letter-by-letter allowing everyone to compare answers. If you want to keep track of scores: each person with a unique answer that no one else was able to come up with gets a point.

GRATITUDE FOR EACH OTHER

(PREPARATION: This exercise requires the most prep, but it’s also the most fulfilling. A few days to a week before you plan on doing the retreat, the facilitator needs to separately e-mail each person in the group and ask them to respond by writing out one sentence about each of the people that will be part of the retreat group. The sentence should contain either a compliment about the person or highlight something specific they are thankful for about that person. Once all responses have been received, the facilitator needs to compile each of the specific remarks into one reader-friendly paragraph about each person (making sure to keep everything anonymous—think of it all as one combined paragraph of compliments) with the name of the person being complimented at the top of the page. Each of these paragraphs then need to be printed out separately so that, at the retreat, much like the first quote group reading exercise, participants can take turns drawing these out of a bowl or basket and reading them aloud. It works best if they read it directly to the person it pertains to, as if it’s a letter from the group. Then, the person who was just complimented should be the one to draw the next “letter” from the bowl, and so on, until everyone has been read to. The facilitator should feel free to include themselves in this exercise, as well.)

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This final exercise has the potential to be a revitalizing and emotional experience for a group that works together or sees each other frequently. The basis is that it's nice to be grateful for things in one's life, but sometimes it's also very helpful to hear "out loud" why others (especially coworkers and family members) are grateful for you.

CLOSING

Remember, gratitude is a very important aspect of life that should not be overlooked or underrated. It has the ability to grow good feelings and happiness, and make others feel warm and welcomed at home, in the office, or wherever they might be. Participants should walk away from this retreat feeling more appreciative and more appreciated, and be encouraged to use some of these practices in their daily lives.

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_____ 'S APPRECIATION LIST

I'M GLAD I'M _____.

I'M GRATEFUL FOR _____.

I AM FORTUNATE BECAUSE _____.

I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT _____.

SOMEONE IN MY LIFE I'M VERY THANKFUL FOR IS _____
BECAUSE _____.

SOMETHING I DON'T RECOGNIZE AS GOOD IN MY LIFE AS
OFTEN AS I SHOULD IS _____.

I AM LUCKY BECAUSE _____.

I AM BLESSED TO BE ABLE TO _____.

I AM HAPPY THAT I CAN _____.

(Exercise 1)

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SPELLING OUT G-R-A-T-E-F-U-L

WRITE OUT AS MANY THINGS AS YOU CAN THAT YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR THAT BEGIN WITH THE LETTERS BELOW.

G _____

R _____

A _____

T _____

E _____

F _____

U _____

L _____

(Exercise 2)