



This week...

An Attitude of Gratitude

"Start each day with a positive thought and a grateful heart." – Roy T. Bennett

One of the great lessons of 2020 was that of **gratitude**. We became more grateful for our ability to flex and adapt to our changing environments, for the availability of our core necessities (aside from the toilet paper shortages!), and for our teams, communities and critical friends.

Gratitude is an *amazing* 'drug' for our brains. This makes it the perfect exercise to practice during a short break in our day to boost our outlook and – more importantly – our health!

How does gratitude do that, you ask?

Over the past decade, many studies have demonstrated that people who consciously count their blessings tend to be happier and less depressed. Other research concludes that gratitude not only boosts your mental health, but also your overall well-being.

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scans on the brain confirm that feelings of gratitude and appreciation of others actually changes the neural structures in the brain and makes us feel happier and more content. This triggers our 'good' hormones and regulates the effective functioning of our immune system. Therefore, like a natural *Prozac*, gratitude can boost the neurotransmitter serotonin and activate the brain stem to produce dopamine – our 'happy chemicals'.

The positive effects don't just stop in our brains, however. Researchers have explored how gratitude influences the region of the brain – the hypothalamus – that controls

many essential bodily functions necessary for good health including sleep, eating, and drinking. The hypothalamus also impacts our stress levels and metabolic rate, which affects our weight and overall health.

Undoubtedly, experiencing gratitude has a positive effect on the hypothalamus region of the brain. Regular practice of this emotion can help regulate many behaviors and functions that contribute to our overall health and well-being. And, better yet, it is a quality we can continually nurture and grow!

Weaving Gratitude into Your Day

This week, try to carve out some moments for rest, recovery, and practicing gratitude. Not only will this give you a quick rush of positive feelings but, over time, this practice can have a significant impact on your health.

Here are seven tangible ways to practice gratitude:

1. **Appreciate everything.** Gratitude doesn't have to be saved for the big things in life. The habit of being grateful recognizes that there is nothing too small for you to be thankful for.
2. **Write a 'thank-you' note.** You can make yourself happier and nurture your relationship with others by writing a 'thank-you' letter, expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life. Make a habit of sending at least one gratitude note a month.
3. **Say 'thank you'.** Keep your eyes open throughout the day for reasons to say 'thanks'. Try to recognize the small actions people do every day that might be overlooked, such as a colleague who always goes the extra mile or a friend who always seems willing to listen.
4. **Keep a gratitude journal.** Write down three things each day that you are grateful for.
5. **Find a gratitude buddy.** Consider engaging a 'gratitude buddy' for your daily practice – it can be your spouse, your kid, or your colleague. Set aside some time every day where you discuss together the things you are thankful for.
6. **Challenge your perspective.** Another way to cultivate gratitude is to identify something you are grateful for even when find yourself in a difficult situation or challenge.

7. **Meditate.** Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on the present moment without judgment. You will find many mindfulness sessions online that focus on gratitude. You could also simply spend a few minutes to quietly focus on what you're grateful for in that particular moment, such as the warmth of the sun or a pleasant sound.

Start your year off with an 'attitude of gratitude' – *you'll be grateful that you did!*

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the **ReFresh** series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Darren Danyluk

President



BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association
#200 - 525 West 10th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 1K9

o: 604-689-3399

t: 1-800-663-0432

d: 604-877-5388



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