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Plus

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How to Spread Gratitude

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat blogletter on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate communications training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

Last week, near the end of a two-day writing program I taught in Oakland, Calif., a female participant walked up and handed me a greeting card. "It's not much," she said. "But I believe the grace and style you showed in this class are going to change my life." On the way back to my hotel, I read the woman's message. I was speechless. "I want you to know how much I appreciate meeting you," the note said. "You are so lively and open with your feelings, and you do so with great comfort. . . I don't often meet women of your positive attitude toward life. Thank you so much for all you have shared with us."

In this impersonal world, the woman's words made my day, my week, my month, and my year. Heck, I may go to the grave thinking fondly of her tribute. Of all human traits, I have long thought gratitude was the most attractive. Being on the receiving end of the woman's compliments reinforced my belief big time. I'm far from alone in my long-time admiration for people who habitually see the glass half full. Quotation books are filled with pages and pages and pages of sayings on thankfulness.

From Albert Schweitzer, a legendary scientist of the 20th century: "At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by the spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted that flame within us."

From Melodie Beattie, author of numerous books on codependence: "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. I turns what we have into enough, and more."

From Buddha, the originator of the spiritual path named for him: "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."

Despite the longstanding body of wisdom about gratitude, little seems to filter into everyday business life. Do you feel, for instance, that you've ever been thanked enough for your incredible contributions at your job in high tech, retail, or manufacturing? I suspect not. But rather than wait to receive thanks, why not give it – especially in these stressful economic times. Change needs to start somewhere; it may as well be from you. Some ideas:

Recognize the power of one. When you say thank you, as the woman did this week to me, you lift someone's spirit –probably more than you'll ever know. What an easy way to buffer the day-to-day challenges of another human being.

Set a gratitude goal. I try to voice appreciation at least once a day beyond the regular "thank you." Each time I encounter a friendly and efficient call center representative on the phone, for example, I ask for the person's supervisor and compliment the wonderful service.

Be prepared. Whenever I travel, I pack a booklet of stickers containing words of encouragement intended for students. I buy them in the school supplies sections at CVS, Target, and KMart.



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Before leaving my hotel room in the morning, I always affix a few stickers saying “Bravo.” “Great Work” or “Hooray for You” on a note for the housekeeper. I also leave a few dollars to thank the person for cleaning up my messes.

Create gratitude rituals. Many families go around the table at Thanksgiving and on other occasions sharing things they’re grateful for. I think the same practice would be equally – or more -- beneficial at business gatherings. Imagine opening team get-togethers with a round-the-table statements about a recent job-related event that provoked a sense of gratitude. These days, many workers might appreciate the chance simply to verbalize their thanks for still having a job and getting a paycheck.

Send written messages. I regularly scan the “thank you” racks in Hallmark stores. My current favorite card depicts a dog on the front saying “How can I thank you? Let me count the ways.” The inside message adds: “This is when fingers would come in handy.” The humor tickles me so much that I suspect I have absentmindedly sent that dog-gone card more than once to several friends and acquaintances throughout the country. Yes, Marie, Lonnie, Isabel, Paul, Lynn, Cathy, Sandi, Kathy, Lisa, Jessica, Sal, Dean, Bridget, Richard, Robert and many others – I’m talking about you.

Express gratitude visually. I know a manager who buys “Kudos” cereal bars to thank employees who recently have gone the extra mile. The name of the treat means “well done” in Greek. Many recipients save rather than eat them. It’s so nice to have a memento of feeling appreciated.

Walk your talk. It’s one thing to frequently say “thank you,” it’s another to show it regularly in your behavior. My husband Joe is a master of the latter. The most generous person I have ever encountered, Joe often shows gratitude with well-thought-out gifts and celebrations. Upon my return from the California trip I mentioned earlier, for instance, I walked into a family room full of balloons and decorations he had put up for my birthday. He also had ordered a cake decorated solely to make me feel better about the aging process. It said simply: “Happy Birthday to My Gorgeous Trophy Wife.” I thanked him profusely.

Dr. Kathleen Begley owns and operates Write Company Plus communications training outside Philadelphia. She has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.