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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COACHING

go inward. move forward.

Gratitude: Finding Your Way to Grateful Living

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The benefits of gratitude have been scientifically proven, and I'm not here to argue them. They include psychological benefits like more positive emotions and less stress, social benefits such as more connected relationships, and even physical benefits like better sleep and fewer health complaints. Living more gratefully can lead to feeling more satisfaction in life overall.

Brene Brown, who I hold in high regard, points to 'the research' to affirm that gratitude invites more joy into our lives. She reports that people who describe themselves as joyful or their lives as joyous also describe themselves as practicing gratitude.

Where I think a lot of people get stumped is with the word 'practice'. It can feel out of reach when we believe there's one perfect universal way to practice something or else we're doing it wrong. That's simply not true.

To meaningfully cultivate a more positive outlook and invite more happiness and joy into your life, which is what practicing gratitude is ultimately about, you need to find an approach you can genuinely connect with.

Healthy Positivity

The concept of gratitude has understandably become trendy, because in our culture of 'never enough' we often need reminders to appreciate the good that's already there. Inviting more positivity into our lives is a great thing, especially given current world events.

However, it's important to approach it in a healthy way. Try on different approaches, and don't beat yourself up if a gratitude journal or an 'attitude of gratitude' just doesn't work for you as it might for others in your network.

It's also important to understand that there's a point where positivity turns toxic if we're expected to deny anything negative and *only* look at the positives, or 'flip a negative into a positive'. The 'positive vibes only' culture is prevalent on social media these days, and not only is it harmful, it's unrealistic.

We need positivity, but we also need a realistic lens about what it means to be human. Here are some realities that I'm inviting you to embrace:



- A state of constant positivity is unrealistic and unachievable for most of us.
- We all experience good feelings and bad feelings, positives and negatives. Nothing is wrong with us when we experience the negative stuff.
- It's natural to want to feel better and more positive quickly, but sometimes it takes time and can't be forced or faked.
- Everyone's tool kit can look different! Criticizing yourself if a popular practice of gratitude or positivity doesn't work for you is counterproductive, and leads to more negativity.

If you have a gratitude practice that works for you, keep going! Just check in with yourself and ensure you aren't faking it, forcing it or listing things that you 'should' be grateful for, when you don't actually feel it. Feeling it means experiencing those warm sensations of positivity, joy, happiness and enjoyment on a sensory level, not just an intellectual one. Listing things without actually feeling them isn't going to help you live gratitude.

If you don't connect with some of the popular ways to cultivate gratitude or a positive outlook, here's the good news: there are many other things for you to experiment with to really feel into gratefulness.

The Difference Between Gratitude and Gratefulness

I view 'gratefulness' as even more powerful than gratitude. It's one level deeper and sometimes more tangible in my opinion.

Kristi Nelson, Executive Director of [A Network for Grateful Living](#), explains the differentiation in '[Ten True Things About Gratefulness](#)'. She sees gratitude as being more focused on the getting or experiencing of something that we want. When something good happens to us, we count it as a blessing. Gratefulness, however, is something she views as an "overall orientation to life." She explains that "When we wake up in the morning and experience a sense of gratefulness just for the fact of being alive, with our heart and senses open to the gifts and opportunities of another day, it's a more radical approach to gratitude that's not contingent on something happening to us, but rather a way that we arrive to life."

Can you feel the difference in the two approaches? Neither is wrong, and they can work together. You can embrace both the benefits of gratitude and gratefulness by appreciating the good and also the 'great fullness' of life itself.

Practical Tools



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You might be thinking, “How can I appreciate the great fullness of life? Give me the tools!” Here are four areas you can lean into, and they can all work together beautifully. Just remember to take and try on what resonates with you. None of this should feel like a chore; it needs to feel genuinely good to you.

Gratitude and Gratefulness

Gratitude is focused around thankfulness: tuning into what and who you’re thankful for. As mentioned above, sometimes it can be very focused on the good things that we receive in life. That’s not wrong, but what I like about gratefulness is that it’s more about noticing where in your life you feel sufficient already.

Sometimes gratitude on its own can feel like too much pressure, and some people can’t grasp it as easily as others. Looking at where we’re sufficient is an alternative starting point that may help us find things we’re grateful for.

Ask yourself: Without anything more or extra, what feels like enough already? Be honest. You may want to earn more money, but when you really look from the lens of sufficiency, is what you already have sufficient right now? Notice the ‘enough-ness’ in your life and see if gratitude grows from there.

With gratefulness being a commitment to appreciating the great fullness of life itself, we need to acknowledge that a full life includes the not so positive periods in life. We can still live gratefully in those circumstances by appreciating the smallest things in any given moment.

Experiment by imagining that you have a magnifying glass or a zoom lens available to you throughout your day. In every moment, what can you zoom in on and appreciate? You can always find something. It could be the color of the strawberry on your plate, or the sense of connection you felt as you chatted in the hallway (or on that zoom call!) with a co-worker. It could even be the fact that you have a co-worker at all in a time when many people are losing their jobs. Magnifying and appreciating these small experiences of pleasure, connection or meaning is one way to cultivate gratitude and gratefulness, even in hard times.

Testing out gratitude rituals to share with your loved ones is also a great practice. You don’t have to write them down, you can say them out loud. Some families like to share what they’re grateful for at mealtimes together. I love sharing something that went well, something that was challenging and something funny. I find it gets my young daughter more engaged because those questions are often easier to answer than simply scanning for what we’re grateful for. The enjoyment of the ritual itself is another way to live gratefulness.



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And if none of the above works for you, sometimes simply asking “what do I take for granted?” is a way into noticing what you’re actually grateful for.

Sensing and Savouring

Savouring the good and pleasurable experiences in our lives is a sure-fire way to cultivate more positivity and a sense of happiness and joy.

To savour is to allow yourself to be with an experience fully, noticing what all your senses are doing and turning towards what’s pleasant. When you savour something, you linger longer with the enjoyment, you draw it in further and notice the specific qualities of the pleasurable thing. It could be a sound, a smell, the way something tastes or even the way the texture of the food feels in your mouth, noticing your eyes being drawn to something beautiful, or feeling into the comfort of your bed.

My most precious moments of savouring right now happen when I cuddle with my daughter in the morning, just before the morning rush of routine sweeps us up. I allow myself to savour the feeling and the warmth of our cuddle and connection, and pay attention to all of my senses to linger in those moments and fully capture the enjoyment of them.

Savouring the present is so fulfilling - but you can also savour a memory, a relationship or your own successes by letting yourself contemplate and appreciate the good.

Savouring intensifies positive emotions. It’s a lot easier to identify the good in your life when you allow yourself to fully experience those pleasurable moments. You may love riding your bike as a hobby, but allowing yourself to savour the feeling of the wind on your face, notice the strength of your legs as you pedal and the smells in the air intensifies what’s so enjoyable about the experience overall. The more you savour these things, the more you appreciate them.

Some questions to explore: What was worth savouring today? What do I want to savour more to intensify the enjoyment?

Self-Appreciation

Many people struggle with self-appreciation. It can make us feel like we’re being self-indulgent or egotistical, but it’s a really important practice that invites more positivity into our lives. I always make sure my coaching clients spend a lot of time on acknowledging what they appreciate about what they’ve done, how they showed up, and who they are. They



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usually thank me for ‘forcing them’ to sit with the challenge of self-appreciation because the benefits are so impactful.

There’s nothing egotistical about appreciating yourself, your strengths and good qualities. Recognizing it as a tool to evoke a more positive outlook may free you of any biases you have against it.

One small way to cultivate self-appreciation is to stop deflecting compliments and instead receive them with thanks. Then allow yourself to savour the positive emotions that come with being appreciated by others.

Acknowledgment of What’s Going Well - From a Whole Life Perspective

One of a coach’s favorite questions to ask clients is, “What’s going well?” Culturally, we’re conditioned to focus on what’s going badly or what we want to change. We rarely stop to notice what’s going well, and this question can be a great alternative to “What am I grateful for?”

To reap the benefits, you need to ask this question from a whole life perspective. Your life is made up of many different pieces: work/career, family, social circles, romance and intimacy, health and wellness, fun & recreation, finances/money, spirituality and learning/personal development. Each can be broken down even further to make up your unique whole life picture.

When something’s going wrong or presenting a challenge in one area, you may not be able to appreciate anything good there. It’s helpful in those moments to zoom out and remember the wholeness of your life beyond that one area of struggle. If you’ve lost your job, you’re justified to feel badly about that and there may be nothing in that moment that you’re grateful for in the context of your career. But you’re not just your work; you’re a whole person, so look at what you are grateful for or what’s going well in all the other areas.

For some people, silver linings resonate. For some, a daily gratitude list fits. For others, just savouring the good in the moment is enough. Whatever works for YOU is the right way to experience the great fullness of life.

ABOUT JENNY



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Jenny Tryansky is an ICF-credentialed Certified Professional Co-Active Coach with a **whole life/whole person approach**.

In her private practice, she works virtually with clients around the world, specializing in working one-on-one with people who are driven yet highly self-critical.

She coaches clients to build meaningful, authentic lives, tackling personal and professional challenges with self-compassion and resilience, as they move forward toward their goals fuelled with confidence instead of self-criticism.

In addition to coaching private clients, Jenny is a writer, speaker, workshop & group leader and mindful self-compassion advocate.

She juggles life in Toronto with her husband and young daughter, and her work with clients around the world.

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