



UICS NEWS

Fall is upon us and with it comes a change in the weather and a transformation of the trees. Some people use this time as an opportunity to take stock of their lives; to slow down and look closely at where they've come from and where they are heading. With the upcoming arrival of Thanksgiving, it is also a time to appreciate the aspects of life that can easily be taken for granted throughout the rest of the year.

Thanksgiving is traditionally a time to reflect upon and appreciate the sources of wealth and joy in our lives, regardless of our life circumstances. To coincide with the tradition of Thanksgiving, we have chosen the theme of gratitude for our Fall 2015 newsletter.

Sometimes life can get us down and it can be a struggle to see that elusive silver lining. However, it is in times such as these when gratitude can be of most benefit. A number of recent studies have shown a connection between the presence of gratitude in a person's life and a variety of emotional, social and physical health benefits, including heightened mood, stronger relationships and increased longevity, among others.

Gratitude does not come naturally to everybody but, like many useful life skills, it is something that can be strengthened through practice. We hope that some of the ideas in this newsletter help you foster an attitude of gratitude in your life. And, as always, the staff at UICS is here to support you with whatever life challenges you may face.

The Team @UICS

Turn Pain to Joy:

11 Tips for a Powerful Gratitude Journal

“Give thanks for a little and you will find a lot” ~Hausa Proverb

- 1. Don't just go through motions. Make a decision to be consciously more grateful.** Don't reluctantly journal because you think you should. Feel what you write. Believe it.
- 2. Don't set yourself a minimum number of things to write per day.** This is a toughie. Many sites will recommend five or so things per day. In my experience, there are days I have less, and that's perfectly okay. On balance there are days I can fill a page. Don't put yourself under pressure to stick to the same amount each day. Be flexible and don't take the joy away by being too regimented.
- 3. Don't wait for the right time.** I try to integrate this into my bedtime routine, but if I have a joyful experience, I often write

it down straight away. This reinforces the positivity felt and ensures I don't forget anything.

4. Elaborating on why you are grateful allows you to really explore your feelings. If, like me, you intend on flicking back through your journal, make it clear why you are grateful for the items you add. For example: For the first entry, I put “my children.” On day two, I wrote, “my children for putting on a sock puppet show after school and making me laugh.” That triggers so many memories each time I read it and always makes me smile.

5. Focus on people rather than things. As much as I love my iPod, it can never give me the same warm, fuzzy, loved feeling my partner instills by making me a surprise breakfast in bed.

6. Don't rush; savor every word. Don't see this as another chore to get through. The fact that you can make a list of things that make you feel grateful should make you feel, umm, well, grateful!

7. Include surprises. Unexpected events often elicit a greater emotional response. They're also wonderful to look back on when you feel that life is mundane and the same old routine all the time.

8. Keep the negative out. If you want to keep a diary to record how you feel, this can be constructive, but leave your gratitude journal as a purely positive only exercise.

9. Mix it up. Don't put same thing every day. Expand your awareness. The more you do this, the more you'll start to really appreciate what a gift life is. The world is beautiful. Learn to really experience it.

10. Be creative. Who says a gratitude journal has to be full of lists? Mine contains everything from concert tickets, to photos and restaurant receipts. Have some fun with it.

11. Give it a fair chance. It takes, on average, 21 days for a new habit to form. Don't give up or dismiss it as not working before then. Commit to just three weeks and then see how you feel. What have you got to lose?

*- Excerpt from article by Louise Jensen, Holistic Therapist,
www.thehappystarfish.com*

“We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing & appreciating what we do have.”

- Frederick Koenig

Couples Corner



Does Gratitude Matter in Marriage?

“Please” and “thank you” often come out of our mouths automatically. How can we use true gratitude and thankfulness more fully to cultivate healthy relationships?

When we truly feel gratitude, we experience heartfelt awe and appreciation for the goodness of something outside ourselves. Having gratitude towards someone or something means respecting its value and treasuring how unique, beautiful, or indispensable it is.

New studies support the idea that gratitude is an integral part of healthy relationships. As marriages move past the honeymoon stage, couples may go from appreciating and loving every little detail about each other to taking each other for granted. Amie Gordon, a psychologist from U.C. Berkeley, blames this for the downfall of many relationships. “You get used to having [your spouse] in your life and forget why you chose to be with them.” Dr. Gordon’s study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* explores the role of gratitude and appreciation in maintaining long and healthy relationships.

Couples who had ongoing reciprocal appreciation were less likely to break up in the next nine months and even reported being more committed at the end of that time. The researchers concluded that a nourishing cycle of encouragement and appreciation provides extra incentive to maintain our relationships. In other words, when we appreciate our partners, we develop trust and respect. When we feel appreciated, we feel needed and encouraged.

In the second part of the study **the team noticed that “highly appreciative” pairs tended to use body language and response skills to show that they valued their spouses.** When their partner spoke, appreciative spouses leaned in, made eye contact, and responded thoughtfully to what they were saying. **They made it clear that they were listening to and digesting what their spouse said, thereby showing that they valued their spouse’s opinion.** Appreciative couples also used touch and physical encouragement such as handholding or an encouraging pat on the leg.

This study observed the relationship benefits of naturally appreciative couples. The flipside is that some couples are not naturally appreciative. It can be incredibly discouraging to not feel appreciated—you may even feel like your marriage is over. Luckily, our behavior and thoughts are malleable; just as we fell out of patterns of love and gratitude, we can grow back into them.

The key to sparking healthy relationships with gratitude is to take the initiative: **“Instead of just waiting for the other person to make you feel good, you can jumpstart that cycle and take it into your own hands by focusing on what’s good in your relationship,”** says Dr. Gordon. Start with small and easily achievable goals, such as giving your spouse five compliments a day, or simply smiling at her more often.

Gratitude is a skill that you cultivate—nurture it in yourself, and soon you will see positivity radiate back at you.

Adapted from an article by Naomi Grunditz www.poweroftwomarrriage.com



What is Gratitude

Robert Emmons, perhaps the world’s leading scientific expert on gratitude, argues that gratitude has two key components, which he describes in an essay, [“Why Gratitude Is Good.”](#)

“First,” he writes, “it’s an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we’ve received.”

In the second part of gratitude, he explains, “we recognize that the sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves. ... We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you’re of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.”

Emmons and other researchers see the social dimension as being especially important to gratitude. “I see it as a relationship-strengthening emotion,” writes Emmons, “because it requires us to see how we’ve been supported and affirmed by other people.”

Because gratitude encourages us not only to appreciate gifts but to repay them (or pay them forward), the sociologist Georg Simmel called it “the moral memory of mankind.”

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude/definition>