



Let's Talk

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Five Pointers for Expressing Gratitude

Gratitude is an active choice to notice and appreciate good things that you experience each day, rather than ignoring them or taking them for granted.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS CONTROL WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU, BUT YOU CAN CHOOSE HOW YOU RESPOND.

One supportive way to respond is with gratitude. Taking the time to express gratitude can have a number of positive effects on your life and your health. In fact, a number of recent studies have shown a strong connection between practicing gratitude and overall physical and mental well-being.

However, gratitude involves more than occasionally saying “*thank you*.” It is a state of mind that needs to be cultivated so that it is consistent. Here are some suggestions on how to cultivate a sense of gratitude:

1. KEEP A “GRATITUDE JOURNAL.”

Remember, regularly being thankful is key, and an effective way to develop the habit is to make a brief list in a notebook each day of things for which you are grateful.

2. START WITH YOURSELF. What actions have you taken or choices have you made that have made a positive difference in your life? Being appreciative of what you’ve done and giving yourself credit can make it easier to keep taking positive action.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE GREAT AND SMALL THINGS. Remember it’s not just the big things that are worthy of your gratitude. Being thankful for the small and ordinary moments can often lift your spirits just as much.

4. EXPRESS GRATITUDE APPROPRIATELY.

Be careful not to overwhelm people with your expression of appreciation. Ideally, your response should be modest, sincere, and commensurate with the level of your relationship with that particular person. Depending on the situation, expressions can include grateful nod of the head, a thank-you card, a gift, an offer of some food, or doing someone a favor. Of

course, a simple verbal expression of thank you is always appropriate.

5. NO STRINGS ATTACHED. Your gratitude is a gift from you to others. You shouldn’t require people to respond to you in a particular way. Don’t be offended if they don’t react as you expect. It may still affect them more than you realize.

“Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses.” — Alphonse Karr

The very act of expressing gratitude can increase the amount of joy you experience in your life and boost your sense of well-being. At the same time, it helps people around you feel appreciated, which can boost their sense of well-being and self-worth. The power of “*thank you*” is hard to underestimate.

Managing Your “Work Cycle”

Being productive requires finding a balance between concentrated effort and less intense task work, combined with strategic rest periods.

All work and no play make Jack a dull boy, right? But with workdays full of meetings, assignments, deadlines, and multitasking, how can you strike the right balance? The answer may be to manage your “work cycle” to build in periods of less intense concentration and rest breaks during the workday.

Staying on top of your game

Over time, the human mind can be overwhelmed to the point where a worker can lose his or her “edge”—the combination of focus and creativity that commonly promotes peak performance. The average office worker can become easily overwhelmed by the amount of information (i.e., emails, meetings, phone calls, etc.) that comes in each day. That’s why it’s important to manage how you can most effectively deal with the onslaught of information and stimuli to avoid information overload and mental fatigue.

Finding your cycle

Nathan Kleitman, a groundbreaking sleep researcher, found that just as we progress each night through 90-minute cycles and move through five levels of sleep, there are also cycles during the day in which we move from higher to lower alertness.

One such technique was developed by Francesco Cirillo, a former software developer who now consults with technology companies on team management. His strategy, which he named the “Pomodoro Technique,” uses a timer (like a kitchen timer, a watch alarm, or a scheduled alert on your computer) to break down periods of work into 25-minute intervals. These intervals are separated by breaks (the standard is five minutes).

Recognizing these cycles and incorporating regular rest breaks at work can improve your mental agility by allowing you to stay fresh, overcome distractions, and create a better work/life balance.

There are five basic steps to implementing this technique:

1. Decide on the task to be done
2. Set your timer for a set number of minutes (traditionally 25)
3. Work on the task until the timer rings
4. Take a short break (3-5 minutes) from the concentrated task at hand, which could also be a good time to go over simple administrative duties
5. Every four tasks, consider taking a longer break (15–30 minutes—a good time for lunch or a walk around the block)

This “25/5” cycle may not accommodate the needs of every workplace, so feel free to make adjustments. Craft a time management strategy that works best for you and your workplace.



What's Causing My Memory Loss?

Sometimes we may joke about memory loss and how it might be caused by the fact that we're getting older. Yet, for the person experiencing noticeable and persistent memory loss, the daily struggle can be daunting. **And it doesn't just happen to people in their 80s and 90s.**

There's a tendency lately to jump to the conclusion that most memory loss is associated with Alzheimer's disease, but there are other things that can contribute to this problem, including:

- Stress
- Not getting enough quality sleep
- Not getting enough hydration (i.e., not getting enough water or hydrating foods)
- Side-effects of medication
- Confusion due to other mental health issues, like depression or anxiety
- Thyroid disease
- Neurological disorders, such as "mini-strokes" and normal-pressure hydrocephalus
- Overuse or abuse of alcohol and other drugs
- Recent head injury
- Grief over the loss of a loved one

This list shows some of the more common causes. As you can see, there can be many reasons why a person might be experiencing memory loss. This is why it's important to seek the help of a medical professional if you're experiencing symptoms of memory loss, so you can work together to pinpoint the cause and to properly diagnose and accurately treat any disorder you may be experiencing.

When should you be concerned?

Some memory loss is benign and may be caused by the effects of living in our

modern, hectic world. Your brain can become overwhelmed by high-levels of input and activity. So, forgetting where you left your car keys after rushing into the house with your groceries and briefcase is not that unusual, nor should it be a cause for concern.

You should be concerned when you are noticeably forgetful, even when you're not stressed—situations like:

- Losing your way to a familiar place
- Forgetting to attend an event that was important to you
- Needing to ask a question repeatedly because you've forgotten the answer the person gave you
- Repeatedly forgetting a long-time friend's name
- Not being able to follow directions

You should be also concerned if memory loss gets in the way of accomplishing your everyday activities.

Take early action

Make sure that you talk to your health care provider if you're experiencing regular symptoms of memory loss. Sometimes it's a simple matter of lowering stress, getting more quality sleep, or adjusting some medication you're taking. If you think your memory loss is caused by stress, contact your EAP at **1-800-222-0364**, TTY: 1-888-262-7848 or visit the website at **FOH4You.com**.



ESTATE PLANNING: WHERE TO BEGIN

It's never too late to begin to plan for your future—here are a few things that will help you get started.

Estate planning helps you to:

- Determine who will manage your assets
- Under what circumstances and when your assets will be distributed, both during your lifetime and after your death
- How and by whom your personal care will be managed, and how healthcare decisions will be made if you ever become unable to make them yourself

GETTING STARTED

There are many important issues to consider when creating an estate plan. Here are sample questions to ask yourself:

- What are my assets and how much are they worth?
- Who are my beneficiaries and when and how should they receive my assets?
- Who should make decisions about my health and welfare if I become unable to make them myself?
- Who should be responsible for taking care of my dependents (e.g., children, aging parents, pets) if I become unable to take care of them myself?

Estate planning is a process that enables you to address your future needs in the event you become unable to take care of yourself. It also allows you to lay out how you would like your assets distributed after you pass away.

GETTING IT ON PAPER

There are different types of estate planning documents that can be tailored to fit your needs:

- **Advanced Health Care Directive** – Informs your family and medical providers of the types of treatments, tests, and care you do or do not want. It also lists the names of individuals and institutions that will be authorized to make healthcare decisions on your behalf, in the event you become unable to make those decisions.
- **Revocable Living Trust** – Allows you to administer your assets for your own benefit while you are still alive and have your assets transferred to your beneficiaries after your death—all without court involvement.
- **Will** – Names individuals or organizations that will receive your assets after your death, appoints an executor to manage your estate, and specifies who will become guardians of your children, if applicable.

Estate planning can be a complex process. Working with qualified professionals can make it easier to prepare for the future. You can contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help you get started. They're available at **1-800-222-0364**, TTY: 1-888-262-7848, or visit the website at **FOH4You.com**.



This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to Federal employees and agencies throughout the United States. For administrative details about the program, contact Chiquita Cooper at 404-562-7950, ext. 125, or email **Chiquita.Cooper@foh.hhs.gov**.

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