

BE WELL

Gratitude

As we enter into November and my favorite holiday, Thanksgiving, it is a powerful month to start the daily mindful practice of gratitude. What is gratitude? It is the acknowledgement and appreciation for the things, people, and circumstances of your life. We do not need to wait for a surprise or act of kindness from a friend to feel grateful for what we have. We can exercise gratitude every day, celebrating the small things that we often take for granted, such as our senses and physical capabilities. Think about what your life was prior to the Pandemic and now. Think about all the things you took for granted in your normal pre-Pandemic daily routine. Most of us may have operated on auto-pilot, going through the motions of our life and daily routines without truly appreciating all of the aspects that just flowed from home to work and then home again.

A daily gratitude practice has been proven to change the neural pathways of the brain.¹ Neuroscience has proven through research that the brain cannot process gratitude and anxiety at the same time. Our brains are conditioned to function in a repeated way, but positive and negative processes cannot occur simultaneously. If we train our brain for negative thinking, we will continue to create patterns of negative thinking since we have created channels in our neural pathways that become familiar and easy to travel. Likewise, if we train our brains toward positive thinking, we will create and maintain more positive neural pathways, so it is easier and easier to stay positive about external events. You change your perspective to the potentially negative external situations, not the external situations themselves – which, you most likely cannot change. A gratitude practice literally changes our brains on the neural level by serving as a catalyst for our “feel good” neurotransmitters to activate. The focus is on abundant gratitude and not lack. You start to focus more on what you have than what you do not have.

There are many scientifically proven benefits of being appreciative and thankful in a gratitude practice, which makes it an incredible practice to increase your overall well-being. You can improve your overall physical and psychological health – your mental and emotional well-being, but the practice also improves your sleep quality and increases your mental strength. Thus, the symptoms of depression and anxiety decrease as your overall sense of happi-

ness increases. It also keeps you healthier by boosting your immune system and decreasing your perception of chronic pain.

Focusing on gratitude encourages other positive habits to blossom within. These habits help us cultivate health and happiness, not only for ourselves, but for those around us. When we are cultivating positive energy and radiate it outward, those around us feel that energy and it affects their interactions with you and others.² This positive energy:

- Strengthens friendships and opens the door to more relationships
- Enables us to more fully appreciate and celebrate the accomplishments of others
- Helps us operate from a place of complimenting, rather than competing or comparing
- Encourages humility
- Reduces envy and jealousy
- Increases a sense of fulfillment in your life
- Reduces selfishness
- Improves physical and emotional well-being
- Increases empathy and
- Strengthens overall self-esteem.

But, do not take just take my word for it, conduct your own experiment during the month of November and experience the rewards of a gratitude practice yourself with this Gratitude Practice, which requires a quiet location, a chair to sit in, a table and paper to write on, and a paper/pen:

- Take an Aligned Seat
- Eyes Closed - Start to think about all of the things you have to be grateful in your life.
- Open Eyes – Make a list of these things you have to be grateful for (3-5 mins)
- Look at the list and pick 3 things that stand out for you, that you are particularly grateful for today. Memorize them.
- Close eyes and say the 3 chosen things you are grateful for either out loud or quietly to yourself. Just keep repeating these three things. (3-5 mins)
 - I am grateful for #1 _____
 - I am grateful for #2 _____
 - I am grateful for #3 _____
- NOTE: Saying things out loud actually creates an energetic vibration in our body that can enable activation or downregulation of your nervous system and repro-

gramming of our brains.

- Notice what it feels like to say things silently to yourself vs. saying it out loud and notice any differences you experience.
- Let the grateful items go, and just feel any shifts in your body or mind, just from being grateful (1-2 mins)
- Now you have a list, you can add to it whenever you wish, and continue to choose three things daily to be grateful for.
- Whenever you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, anxious or worried, know that you have this gratitude practice in your mindful toolbox to help you breathe through it, alter your nervous system reaction, and shift the neural pathways of your brain.

If you are ready to improve your overall wellbeing and need someone to help support you, please contact Samara Anderson at thehappyhumanprojects@yahoo.com to discuss opportunities to incorporate mindfulness and wellness into your stressful lives as attorneys through private group workshops, courses or 1:1 coaching.

¹ The Neuroscience of Gratitude, Huffington Post, by Emily Fletcher (posted November 24, 2015).

² 7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude, Psychology Today, by Amy Morin (posted April 3, 2015).

³ This practice was expanded upon a Sharon Salzburg Gratitude Meditation.

