

The Practice of Gratitude



I've often heard that **the biggest key to happiness is gratitude**, and I don't doubt that. When we are present to all that is wonderful in our lives, it's difficult to feel depressed and despondent. As I look back on my life, I can see that even in my most difficult times, I still had a lot to be grateful for in my life. I just had to look in the right place! It's all about focus and attitude, I've learned.

Keep a Gratitude Journal

To help me to stay aware of the many blessings in my life, I started to keep a **Gratitude Journal** a few years ago. I confess that I haven't always been consistent with this practice, but when I've maintained my Gratitude Journal, it's helped me to be more positive and upbeat. Here's how it works...

On a daily or almost daily basis, I list three things in my life for which I am grateful. These can be big things or small things; there are no rules for what can be on the list. I've found that it's easy to think of the larger things, such as my wonderful husband, my cozy home, my cats, my vision, and my hearing. The smaller things can be trickier to remember, yet those things also have a powerful impact in my life. Here are some examples of some of the "small things" I've listed in my Gratitude Journal in recent entries:

- *I had an enjoyable walk with Mike along the water this evening.*
- *The sun was out today after many, many rainy days in a row!*
- *My kitties were curled up in the box on my desk all afternoon while I worked.*
- *Our coffee grinder and coffee machine allow me to have delicious coffee every morning.*
- *Class yesterday was both interesting and useful.*

Add "Success" Entries to Your Journal

Since I have a tendency to be down on myself at times, I added a second component to my Gratitude Journal. I also list **three successes** which I've achieved since my last journal entry. As with the gratitude entries, it's easy to remember our big wins, such as getting a job or a new client, completing a difficult project, or having a "crucial conversation" with a loved one. But as we all know, such triumphs are not usually an everyday occurrence. Yet we all have **many** small wins each and every day. Noticing these wins can help us to become more present to the greatness which exists in each and every one of us.

In all honesty, I have to admit that sometimes I have to wrack my brain to come up with three successes for my Gratitude / Success Journal. It is at these times that I really need to reflect upon what I have done well in the various areas of my life. As with the gratitude entries, my success entries are often the "small things." Here are some recent examples of successes which I have recorded in my journal:

- *I got up and moving earlier this morning – was done exercising and getting ready by 10 am (I'm not a "morning person" – LOL)*
- *I found a pair of jeans which fit well and are long enough for me!*
- *I've been keeping my email in-box cleaned out and I'm not spending too much time on email.*
- *I'm doing better at letting go of "should" and allowing myself to enjoy life (this is a BIG success!)*
- *I ran errands and went to the gym yesterday despite not feeling like leaving the house.*

How the Journal Helps...

My Gratitude/Success Journal helps me to be more present to all of the wonderful things in my life and to count my blessings instead of my problems. It also helps me to be more aware of what I do well and to see how my small triumphs contribute to my life satisfaction and overall success. Keeping this journal on a regular basis has led to my becoming a more positive person.

There is an additional use for my journal... When I am feeling particularly low on a given day, I look back at my journal entries for a reminder of my large and small blessings, as well as the ways in which I've succeeded in the various areas of my life. This often provides the boost that I need to get out of victim mode and get back on track to being grateful and positive.