

## Gratitude is a Positive Choice

I spent the last week hauling rubbish, cleaning and patching my rental house, left in rough shape by my tenants. It's been quite a saga, and as we all do, I'm writing and rewriting the story of how it all happened, who I believe they were and who I am on the other side. The truth is, I like the concreteness and physicality of such work, but I also enjoy the opportunity to listen while I work to the many good podcasts that inform, inspire and uplift. Here is a link to one you might find worth your time: <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/why-is-my-life-so-hard/> . It looks at a study on the headwinds/tailwinds asymmetry, our human tendency to put more emphasis on the perceived headwinds that make life challenging and under appreciate the positive tailwinds that ease our way.

Now it is my intention to acknowledge the choices that are in play in every situation, so while I'm scrubbing away and grumbling about the nerve of those tenants, I was also looking for the thoughts that kept me motivated and able to push through. In my many conversations with residents here I was reminded about the essential practice of gratitude, and so even while dragging out the moldy carpet I tried to remember with thanks for the equity they helped me build, to the various tradespeople and who provided upkeep help along the way, and to my wonderfully willing son practicing a little payback on this rainy day.

In the world of positive psychology there is a lot of research being done on the benefits of gratitude as a daily practice. I will link here a long article from Robert Emmons of UC Davis and Berkeley's Greater Good Magazine: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_gratitude\\_is\\_good/](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good/). For those of you wondering how to cultivate more of this life affirming view of the world, here is Professor Emmons' list. Thanks for the chance to share what inspires me!

## 10 Ways to Become More Grateful

### **Robert Emmons offers everyday tips for living a life of gratitude.**

- 1. Keep a Gratitude Journal.** Establish a daily practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy. Setting aside time on a daily basis to recall moments of gratitude associated with ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life gives you the potential to interweave a sustainable life theme of gratefulness.
- 2. Remember the Bad.** To be grateful in your current state, it is helpful to remember the hard times that you once experienced. When you remember how difficult life used to be and how far you have come, you set up an explicit contrast in your mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratefulness.
- 3. Ask Yourself Three Questions.** Utilize the meditation technique known as Naikan, which involves reflecting on three questions: "What have I received from \_\_\_?", "What have I given to \_\_\_?", and "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?"
- 4. Learn Prayers of Gratitude.** In many spiritual traditions, prayers of gratitude are considered to be the most powerful form of prayer, because through these prayers people recognize the ultimate source of all they are and all they will ever be.
- 5. Come to Your Senses.** Through our senses—the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear—we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive. Seen through the lens of gratitude, the human body is not only a miraculous construction, but also a gift.

**6. Use Visual Reminders.** Because the two primary obstacles to gratefulness are forgetfulness and a lack of mindful awareness, visual reminders can serve as cues to trigger thoughts of gratitude. Often times, the best visual reminders are other people.

**7. Make a Vow to Practice Gratitude.** Research shows that making an oath to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the action will be executed. Therefore, write your own gratitude vow, which could be as simple as “I vow to count my blessings each day,” and post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day.

**8. Watch your Language.** Grateful people have a particular linguistic style that uses the language of gifts, givers, blessings, blessed, fortune, fortunate, and abundance. In gratitude, you should not focus on how inherently good you are, but rather on the inherently good things that others have done on your behalf.

**9. Go Through the Motions.** If you go through grateful motions, the emotion of gratitude should be triggered. Grateful motions include smiling, saying thank you, and writing letters of gratitude.

**10. Think Outside the Box.** If you want to make the most out of opportunities to flex your gratitude muscles, you must creatively look for new situations and circumstances in which to feel grateful.