

Gratitude Exercise 1: Thanking Someone Important to You

Select one important person from your past who has made a major positive difference in your life and to whom you have never fully expressed your thanks. (don't confound this selection with new-found romantic love, or with the possibility of future gain)

Write a testimonial just long enough to cover one laminated page. Take your time composing this; several weeks is good. Invite that person to your home, or travel to that person's home.

It is important you do this face to face, not just in writing or on the phone. Do not tell the person the purpose of the visit in advance; a simple, "I just want to see you" will suffice. Wine and cheese do not matter, but bring a laminated version of your testimonial with you as a gift.

When all settles down, read your testimonial aloud slowly, with expression, and with eye contact. Then let the other person react unhurriedly. Reminisce together about the concrete events that make this person so important to you.

(If you wish, you may send Martin Seligman a copy at Seligman@psych.upenn.edu)

Gratitude Exercise 2: Daily Gratitude Diary

This is especially helpful for people who scored in the lower half of either the gratitude or the life satisfaction test. (You can take the test at www.authentichappiness.org)

This is a two-week exercise. Prepare a pad with one page for each of the next fourteen days.

On the first night, take the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the General Happiness Scale (Handouts or online) and score them.

Each night, right before you brush your teeth for bed, or otherwise prepare to go to bed, set aside five free minutes. Think back over the previous twenty-four hours and write down, on separate lines, up to five things in your life you are grateful or thankful for. Common examples include "waking up this morning," "the generosity of friends," "God for giving me determination," "wonderful parents," "robust good health," and "the Beatles" (or some other artistic inspiration.

On the final night, two weeks after you start, repeat the Life Satisfaction and General Happiness Scales.

If this works for you, incorporate it into your regular nightly routine.

How to Forgive: Five Step Process: REACH

1. R – recall

Recall the hurt, in as objective a way as you can. Do not think of the other person as evil. Do not wallow in self-pity. Take deep, slow, and calming breaths as you visualize the event.

2. E – empathize

Try to understand from the perpetrator's point of view why this person hurt you. This is not easy, but make up a plausible story that the transgressor might tell if challenged to explain. To help you do this, remember the following:

- When others feel their survival is threatened, they will hurt innocents.
- People who attack others are themselves usually in a state of fear, worry, and hurt
- The situation a person finds himself in, and not his underlying personality, can lead to hurting.
- People often don't think when they hurt others; they just lash out.

3. A – giving the altruistic gift of forgiveness

Another difficult step. First, recall a time you transgressed, felt guilty, and were forgiven. This was a gift you were given by another person because you needed it, and you were grateful for this gift. Giving this gift usually makes us feel better. But we do not give this gift out of self-interest. Rather we give it because it is for the trespasser's own good. Tell yourself you can rise above the hurt and vengeance. If you give the gift grudgingly, however, it will not set you free.

4. C – commit yourself to forgive publicly.

You might write a "certificate of forgiveness" or a letter of forgiveness to the offender; write a poem or a song, or tell a trusted friend what they have done. These are all contracts of forgiveness that lead to the final step.

5. H – stands for hold onto forgiveness.

This is another difficult step, because memories of the event will surely recur. Forgiveness is not erasure; rather, it is a change in the tag lines that a memory carries. It is important to realize that the memories do not mean unforgiveness. Don't dwell vengefully on the memories, and don't wallow in them. Remind yourself that you have forgiven, and read the documents you composed.