

The attitude of GRATITUDE

Do you acknowledge a caring and helpful attitude within a member of your staff? If you do, you are showing them gratitude, says **Deborah Magnum Copelli**.



JUST BY RECOGNISING them and saying “thank you”, you are creating an ambiance of trust, warmth, and security that will win you and your salon or spa many accolades.

The benefits of instilling gratitude in your working environment makes for happier and more fulfilled employees, clients, and you. Not only does it reap emotional and spiritual rewards, it also shows up as a positive in your bank account. Some of the ways management consultants and scientists have measured gratitude is by surveying those organizations that promote it, and those that don't. It seems natural that gratitude in our businesses would be a win, but statistically only 30 per cent of companies, (in the USA that is), actually have a positive cultural stance on gratitude. Those organisations reward staff who practice it and encourage them to take five minutes out of their busy day to write in a “gratitude” journal.

Have you ever given your staff a nicely bound blank page book in which they could write

down what they were grateful for? Not to worry; there's no time like the present. And contrary to some business consultants' opinions, when owners and managers encourage employees to share personal highs and lows, it's considered healthy and valuable for the workplace. So the next time one of your therapists shows you a picture of her son graduating from primary school, know that she feels engaged and comfortable with you; be thankful, and show her gratitude for sharing. Employees need to feel like their workplace is their second home and a pleasure to attend five days per week. We spend on average eight hours a day and 40 hours a week there; same as we do getting a good night's sleep. Studies have shown that when gratitude is a daily top-of-management- down practice, we can expect more employee teamwork and greater feelings of connection, safety, fulfillment and happiness.

“Count your many blessings, count them one by one”; perhaps some of you remember this little nursery rhyme? I know I do. And if there were any complaints uttered at the dinner table growing up in my family, we'd all be reminded of the many poor children starving in third world countries. So we ate what was in front of us and were thankful. How did these images of severely malnourished and emaciated children really serve me, or any of us who heard these words from our parents? Well, it turns out that neuro-biologically it served us in a positive way by instilling a sense of gratitude and appreciation for what we had, rather than what we wanted or thought we needed.

Through ‘fmri’ (functional magnetic resonance imaging) scans of the brain, neuroscientists can measure the positive effectiveness of practicing gratitude on a regular basis. Gratitude literally lights up the two brain hemispheres in the medial pre-frontal cortex, on the top and in the middle of our head, where the two sides of our brain comes together. These areas regulate our emotions, and support and process stress relief - and we can all use more relief from stress. This area of our brain also helps us understand other people's perspectives, gives us more empathy and encourages our own feelings of release. It's also considered the, “mu-opioid” network; the same area of the brain that benefits from touch and pain relief. It is thought this brain area evolved from our ancestral grooming behavior. And so befitting it is that gratitude would be practiced in the spa and salon environment. The more gratitude we show, experience, and bestow upon one another, the greater social connection we feel to each other and our clients; it's where more bonding occurs.

“Feeling grateful and recognising help from others creates a more relaxed body state and allows the subsequent benefits of lowered stress to wash over us”. And isn't this what we all wish, for our therapists and staff? The more relaxed, confident, happy and content our staff, the more our clients will be drawn into our places of business and the more likely they are to return. And what about gratitude for our clients? It goes without saying that this pays off in spades as well; genuine recognition, for their loyalty and the choices they make to visit us for the first time, and every time. Let's show our clients gratitude for choosing us, even if it's only for a very small service.

In the words of Ocean Robbins, “If you've forgotten the language of gratitude, you'll never be on speaking terms with happiness.” Science tells us that “gratitude increases self-esteem, improves sleep, spices up our energy levels, adds elasticity to our bounce-back abilities, fosters relaxation, and improves social behaviors which make it easier to network. It also stimulates goal achievement, enhances decision making, magnifies productivity and makes us nicer, more trusting and more appreciative overall.”

Start to create a Gratitude Culture from the top down. Thank everyone for their compassion, and their sharing of special moments in their lives. Act intentionally by allowing your staff time to journal and write on the company “gratitude board”. Tune into your employees; take the time necessary to listen with compassion and concern.

Here are five ways to create gratitude in your business:

- As the owner, start by expressing your appreciation to your staff, publically and privately. Put these efforts into your protocols and procedures. Arrange a monthly “Gratitude” get-together, where staff can openly acknowledge and share their personal and co-worker gratitude.
- Thank the back-of-house, the forgotten, the thankless, and those spokes in the wheel. So often these people are not seen or heard from on a daily basis, like the bookkeeper who comes in once a fortnight, the laundry delivery person, the cleaners, etc. If you don't see them regularly, leave them a personal note, or buy them flowers or a bottle of nice wine for their birthday.
- Focus on quality over quantity. Create spaces that foster the voluntary, spontaneous expression of gratitude. No need to overdo it; focus instead on detailed authenticity so the person you are acknowledging really knows it's personal and about them.
- Find many opportunities for gratitude. The more people are thanked for their work the more likely they are to assist their fellow team members. A consistent Gratitude journal kept makes us 25 per cent happier. Create a group Facebook page for your spa or salon's Gratitude board, where staff can share the kindness they experience every day from each other, clients, and management alike. Implement a “Gratitude Wall” in the staff room. Non-monetary gifts work magic as expressions of recognition; why not give a special day off, or parking privileges for free for a day? Mediate and meet with any staff in conflict with each other by expressing gratitude

throughout the meeting; the results might surprise you, and peace between the two parties can be lasting.

- Where there is crisis, take time to be thankful. Build a psychological immune system that can cushion the fall where change, conflict, and failure loom. Grateful people are more resilient to stress, be it minor, everyday annoyances, or major personal challenges. Gratitude gives staff tools to “transform an obstacle into an opportunity” and see a loss as a potential gain. Look at lessons learned, find ways to be thankful for what's happened as another door opening, instead of closing. Embrace what new skills might have been gained from this obstacle.

Science says we grow and change with a positive, grateful workplace, where we will enjoy more benefits as a career skill that cultivates a culture of communication, negotiation and forgiveness. We can all learn to become more grateful and everyone involved benefits in the end.

When it comes to writing a Gratitude Journal, here are some helpful ways to motivate and keep you on focus so you maximise your “happiness” benefits.

Start by writing about a good event, experience, person or thing in your life. As you write, be specific; elaborate and get up close and personal. Try the art of subtraction as well - what did you avoid or escape that could have impacted you adversely rather than just taking it all for granted? See the good things that happen in your life as gifts, and savor the surprises by recording them, because the surprises count as double benefits. Write regularly and honor your commitment to your Gratitude Journal. Studies suggest that one to three times per week is sufficient for optimum benefits, so go ahead and start enjoying the good emotions.

“Gratitude brings us together, raises awareness of what we have, and impels us to consider how we can recognise and spread human goodness.” Well said by gratitude specialist, Mike Robbins. So yes, let's spread the love; it's what the world and all of us need now! ■

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