



# Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## Gratitude and Reflections at the End of a Long Year

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**The end of year holiday season is typically considered a time of joy, reflection, and the celebration of traditions passed on through generations. As 2020 winds down as one of the most unique and unprecedented in history, many among us are still holding our collective breaths wondering, "What will come next?" "How much more change and challenges can we anticipate ahead?"**

Right now, we can't predict what will come next. In the spirit of the holiday season, this is the perfect time for us to redirect our stressful energy of this past year, and open ourselves to the opportunity to reflect, recognize and realize the many things we have to be grateful for.

In the best of years, achieving and maintaining an "attitude of gratitude" is challenging for individuals with mental illness, such as depression, or when faced with circumstances such as difficult relationships, poor health, or financial worries. Research has shown that people who practice gratitude regularly are healthier, happier, and have better relationships.

### What is gratitude?

We're most familiar with the idea of being grateful for something tangible such as saying "thank you" after receiving a gift, or someone gives us a compliment, or holds a door for us. There are many definitions for gratitude, in essence it is most commonly attributed to an emotion or feeling that generates positivity, and makes us feel happier and conscious of our blessings. Research shows

experiencing and expressing gratitude not only impacts our attitude, it can bolster physical, psychological, and social well-being as well.

### The gift that keeps on giving

Robert Emmons, psychology professor and gratitude researcher at the University of California, Davis, explains that there are two key components of practicing gratitude:

1. We affirm the good things we've received
2. We acknowledge the role other people play in providing our lives with goodness

Gratitude is a social emotion that grows and benefits all parties. The practice of expressing gratitude creates a positive contagious effect leading the receivers to more likely to continue, and "pay-it-forward" to others.

In order to enjoy these benefits, we need to deliberately learn how to feel gratitude, just as we do any valuable skill. Initially, this can prove difficult because of a tendency to focus on the negative. The great thing is that like any habit, the more we practice expressing gratitude the easier it becomes. The more often we look at things positively the more our brain is trained to think that way.

While 2020 has provided more than its fair share of challenges, among the best blessings to come out of this year are relationships with our friends, families, and co-workers who have navigated so many changes alongside us. We can all tip our hat of gratitude to healthcare workers, first responders and other essential workers who have continued to provide service and care to our communities for the greater good.

### The holiday spirit

How can we end a year like 2020 on a high note? How can we tap into that holiday spirit to redirect, reflect, and give the gift of gratitude which keeps on giving? While we all may differ in holiday practices and beliefs which are abundant and varied near the end of the year, many of us are familiar with

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the Charles Dickens classic, A Christmas Carol. Much like the spirits of Christmas who visited Ebenezer Scrooge, as a signature strength, gratitude is felt and expressed in multiple ways.

It can be applied to:

- The past (retrieving positive memories and being thankful for elements of your childhood or past blessings)
- The present (not taking things for granted as they come)
- The future (being hopeful and optimistic that there will be good things arriving)

### Reflections

Look back at highlights over the past year, or reflect on past blessings, and assess your progress over the past twelve months.

- What goals did you set?
- How has your team and/or family adapted over the past year?
- What new experiences or practices have you implemented that you had not considered, or done on a large scale previously?
- How have others stepped up to the plate?

The more mindful we are about the changes in our lives, the easier it is to see the positive progress we have made. In business, acknowledge your team for coming together or going above and beyond to adapt to face challenges and rapid changes that took place over the course of the year. At home, look to the moments when your family embraced this new togetherness, and took walks or rode bikes in the evening, maybe you finally mastered fifth grade math by helping your child, or the home cooked meals share around the dinner table. The smaller moments provide a snapshot of things we could easily take for granted, and through reflection remind us to cultivate that “attitude of gratitude” for the future.

### Be present

To achieve happiness and success, ignorance is not bliss. Our challenges are part of our journey. Acknowledge them and then learn from them. At the same time, be mindful and to not get stuck focused on negatives. Celebrate the wins as well!

Some questions to pose to those with whom you shared experiences:

- Can we find ways to be thankful for what happened to us now, even though we were not thankful at the time it happened?
- What ability did the experience draw out of us that surprised us?
- Are there ways we have become better (a better workplace) because of this?
- Has the experience removed an obstacle that previously prevented us from feeling grateful?
- These questions will help you find the silver linings in even the most challenging experiences, including those which seemed to be failures.

Additionally, for yourself, consider journaling, writing thank you notes, or sending surprise gifts to those who have traveled with you on this wild ride that has been 2020, or include a gratitude sharing session with colleagues and family, even if gathering remotely. End the year on a positive note, make a list of the things you achieved, and the positive or happy events that happened this year.

### Gratitude yet to come

The last step to wrapping up a positive end to the year is to look towards the future. The New Year is a time for fresh starts. Take the upcoming weeks to create a new list of goals and plans for achieving them. As you do, think back on the past twelve months to know what needs to be improved upon, acknowledge potential unknowns, and what you can continue doing right.

We've all dealt with a lot this year. There are no easy answers to preserving mental health, combating stress, and anxiety, but they do remain priorities for leaders. Gratitude helps us refocus on what we have instead of what we lack.

Ending the year on a high note is all about perspective. There is a silver lining in every situation, whether it be a lesson learned or an unexpected opportunity discovered. Fostering a culture of appreciation can reduce stress, increase happiness, boost mental toughness, and help your team remember the positives. Let your collective gratitude practices power you and those around you through the end of 2020 and well beyond.

First Choice EAP is grateful for the opportunity to provide support and work/life services to our clients and their family members. We remain available 24/7 at 1-800-777-4114, or [www.firstchoiceeap.com](http://www.firstchoiceeap.com), including holidays. We look forward to continuing to support you and your covered family members in the upcoming weeks of 2020 and the New Year ahead.

*Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.*

- William Faulkner

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