

IF ONLY PEOPLE WERE AS GRATEFUL AS DOGS . . .

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By Pauline Wallin, Ph.D.

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As I gave my dog a small morsel of toast the other day, I reflected on how grateful a creature she is. Abby is just as thrilled to receive a crumb as she is to get a huge bone. She never complains that the crumb is too small, or too cold or too moldy even! She always wants more, but if I don't offer it she gets over it quickly. No sulking around for what she didn't get.

Wouldn't it be nice if more people were that way? Not that people are never grateful, but most of the time it's after an accident or a disaster. For example, after a fire you'll often hear the victims say, "We lost everything. But at least we're alive and still have each other." People are also grateful when they're frightened, hurt or down on their luck, and someone comes to their aid. Being on the receiving end of kindness when you need it most, always evokes feelings of gratitude.

When you're in a grateful state of mind, your inner brat is essentially disabled. You feel open and receptive. You feel connected to the world.

Being grateful for what you have is not just a more pleasant state of mind for the moment. There are lasting benefits, both mental and physical. Dr. Robert Emmons, a psychologist who specializes in research on gratitude, found that:

* People who kept a daily "gratitude journal" reported higher levels of alertness, enthusiasm and energy, than those who journaled about hassles or neutral events. This was the case even among people with neuromuscular disease.

* Grateful people report higher levels of life satisfaction and optimism.

* They also are more likely to share their possessions and to help others in need, thereby increasing their feelings of involvement and being appreciated themselves.

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* They are less envious, less resentful, less bitter, and less neurotic. They are also less materialistic.

* Grateful people do not ignore problems. If anything, they may be somewhat more cynical than average. While they may anticipate more difficulties, they are also thankful when other people help make their life easier.

Besides feelings of well-being, an appreciative attitude can also have physical health benefits. One study showed that people who were instructed to focus on appreciation for five minutes had better heart rhythms, than did those who were told to think about anger for the same five minutes.

If this doesn't get you enthused, consider the following research finding: In a study of 180 nuns over time, those who wrote about being positive and appreciative early in life, lived on average 6–9 years

longer than those who were pessimistic and negative.

Even if you have a good number of years behind you, it is not too late to expand your gratitude and appreciation. When you do, your inner brat will instantly recede to the background.

But gratitude doesn't just reduce negative feelings. It also increases positive ones. Instead of feeling angry, empty or victimized, you will experience contentment and perhaps even joy. Despite the stresses and difficulties you're facing, you'll start to notice more beauty in the world.

Here are some tips on cultivating an appreciative attitude:

1. Make a point of saying "Thank you" to someone twice a day.
2. Keep a gratitude journal. Every night before going to bed, write down three things that went well that day. This put you in a positive frame of mind and may help you fall asleep more easily.
3. Think of someone in your past who had a positive influence on you, but whom you never thanked. Write that person a letter of thanks. If possible arrange a visit (without telling the purpose of your visit) and deliver the letter in person.
4. Answer the following question: If you had your life to live over again, what would you NOT do differently? This will give you insight into more positive aspects of your past, and will help you appreciate how you came to be who you are today.

Pauline Wallin, Ph.D. is a psychologist in Camp Hill, PA, and author of "Taming Your Inner Brat: A Guide for Transforming Self-defeating Behavior" (Wildcat Canyon Press, 2004) Visit <http://www.innerbrat.com> for more information, and subscribe to her free, monthly Inner Brat Newsletter.

Find Shortcuts To Happiness

By Beverly Haberman

If someone said you could feel inner peace and joy by just deciding to do it, would you believe them? Well, we're telling you just that! Anyone can choose inner comfort, ease or a feeling of well-being by learning simple tools that will teach you how to make these decisions. Here's a taste of one of the 6 Shortcuts To Happiness we teach at The Option Institute and how you can begin to use it now:

Being Grateful

Take a few moments to sit with your eyes closed and find a quiet place inside yourself. As you do this, begin to breathe in an easy manner. Now think of one person that you feel particularly grateful to have in your life. As you think of this person, bring to mind all the reasons why you appreciate this person, and as you do, notice how you feel. Then gently open your eyes and pick one object that is in your line of vision. Pick anything. Think of all the reasons you feel grateful to have this object. See if you can make your gratitude really big. Now look outside and decide to be grateful for something you see. Can you make your gratitude for this item huge? Notice how you feel as you do this.

We can delight, enjoy and appreciate the wonder of the world around us just by deciding. Gratitude can now be your way to short circuit discomfort, pain and fear and help you to make the decision to choose inner comfort and peace of mind.

Beverly Haberman, Certified Option Process Mentor/Counselor and Teacher/Trainer.
Currently teaching at The Option Institute (

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Practicing The Option Process for 12 years.
Director of Outreach Associates Network.

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