



SERGE BLOCH NEW YORK TIMES

Too many of us take the good things for granted, and waste time and energy fretting about the negatives.

# The gift of gratitude

CELEBRATING the small pleasures in life – a hot coffee, a child's kiss, a sunny day – keeps us happy, and it doesn't have to be something here and now. It could be a wonderful memory of a past event

RHONDA RABOW  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Our society is fast-paced. We are so busy texting, checking out the latest gossip on Twitter and finding out what our friends are up to on Facebook that we can easily distract ourselves from what is going on in our own lives.

Instead of worrying about what others think about us – how we should dress, wear our hair, which car to buy or which school will impress our friends – what if we started to focus on the positives that are in our lives today?

Are our priorities really in the best place? Instead of worrying and over-analyzing all the “what ifs” in life – the negative “what-ifs,” of course, never the positives – what about appreciating what we have achieved right here and now?

There are so many things for us to be grateful for today. It is just too bad that most of us take it for granted and just focus on what is missing or what has disappointed us.

While it is a normal thing to want to achieve, to challenge yourself and improve, it does not mean that you can't take a moment or two to appreciate the accomplishments you have already made. Focusing on what you have achieved, acknowledging and validating those accomplishments will not make you lazy, but will inspire you to do better and challenge yourself even more. If you are always forgetting these achievements, minimizing them or denying the effort it took to get there, you will just end up discouraging yourself and that will affect your motivation to do better.

I see many dissatisfied people, frustrated and discouraged in life. It doesn't matter how much money they have, how good their health is, how well their children or marriage is doing, they take all these things for granted and just focus on the scratch on the car, or waiting “too many minutes in line.”

You can always find something to complain about or criticize. That

doesn't take any effort; it comes to us all naturally. The daily challenge is to ask yourself if you will let this little minor annoyance infiltrate your day, giving it the power to change a beautiful sunny day into a depressing and negative afternoon. What you focus on expands, so as soon as you focus on the scratch on the car, you will also start remembering other annoyances, other times when life has been unfair, now you are on a roll toward your own pity party and forgetting how fortunate you are to actually have a car that takes you where you want to go and arriving safely to your destination.

While you may be spending so much time thinking about what

*There will always be things left and more to get done. That is the nature of our life experience, to grow and learn. What is wrong in celebrating the successes we have earned along the way?*

you should have said to so and so, or how to get even with an ex-friend the next time you meet, you are the only one steaming right now. That terrible person you are boiling over and raging over is not giving a second thought about you and is merrily going along happily in his life. You are the one wasting your time and energy, no one else. When this day is gone, it is gone forever. You just threw out one more day that could have been something special. What a waste of time and energy!

There will always be things left and more to get done. That is the nature of our life experience, to grow and learn.

What is wrong in celebrating the successes we have earned along the way?

It doesn't have to change the world in order to be considered valuable. Whether you are starting an exercise program, making peace with an estranged relative, start-

ing a new career, becoming a single parent, or making a cake like mom used to make, these are all valuable and achievements worth celebrating. It isn't the greatness of the feat that matters, it is the fact that we have made a plan and followed through on an idea. Just the fact it is something that gives us pleasure makes it worthy to celebrate and appreciate.

It is the accumulation of small pleasures that keeps us happy throughout the day.

It doesn't have to be something that is occurring right now, it could be a wonderful memory of a past event or encounter.

Just the fact that it was a sunny day today, that you arrived home

safely, your coffee was hot and delicious this morning and your child gave you a kiss goodbye – these incidents are enough to put a smile on your face and celebrate your life. Don't minimize them, don't deny them, embrace them and dance with life.

You can also make a decision to celebrate the people who have touched your life in a positive way. You can acknowledge them by calling, sending a card or an email.

Of course this can include people you care about today, but what about remembering those special people of years gone by?

For example:  
Your elementary school teacher.  
A tutor who helped you with math and French.

A hairdresser who did your “do” for the prom.

The childhood friend who asked you to join her for lunch.

The coach who told you he saw potential in you.

The neighbour who you stayed with while waiting for your parents to come home.

The high school girlfriend who taught you how to put on makeup.

The camp counsellor who stayed with you when you were homesick.

The therapist who supported you through a difficult time.

We all have had special people in our lives; many of whom may have touched our lives for only a moment in time, but whose impact can still be felt and appreciated today. Can you imagine the joy you would be spreading by contacting some of these past angels? How would they react to being remembered by you after such a long time?

How surprised would they be to hear from you thanking them for being there for you when you needed them?

Can you imagine how thrilled you would feel to receive such a call yourself? Why not start now.

Maybe you will be starting a new trend?

Melodie Beattie, author, once wrote “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, and confusion into clarity. It turns problems into gifts, failures into success, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

Why I like her quote is because I interpret her as saying that even in the most challenging of times, if we focus upon the positive, we can usually find some golden nugget that we can learn from, appreciate or be grateful for.

Enjoy the gift of gratitude. It's the gift that keeps on giving, will always put a smile on your face, and the face of those you touch; and best of all, it's free!

Rhonda Rabow is a psychotherapist in Montreal. She can be contacted by emailing [info@rhondarabow.com](mailto:info@rhondarabow.com) or calling 514-626-4609.