

# Benefits of Gratitude



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A common misconception regarding gratitude is that it encourages people to accept the status quo, resulting in reduced ambition and motivation. However, studies have shown the opposite; that gratitude actually encourages people to work toward their goals.

Why might this be the case? Below is a list of the reasons for why gratitude has positive effects and why you should strive to actively express gratitude in your day-to-day life.

### It Connects us to Others

Expressing gratitude serves to remind us of all the people that are important to us: friends, family, classmates, and colleagues, for example. We feel closer to those whom we are grateful for because our gratitude reminds us of how much they mean to us.

This can lead to self-improvement because of a sense that we don't want to let these people down – our goals cease to be strictly personal in nature, instead they expand and become relevant to the people we are close to. Consider a young woman who is grateful for her dad, who taught her how to drive; when it comes time for the driving exam, she no longer wants to do well just for her own sake, but also to show her father that he taught her well.

Another reason why connectedness helps us is simply that it reminds us of our more general support network. Being aware of every person, pet – or even every object – that helps us through our daily lives leaves us with more confidence and makes us feel as though we can take on greater challenges.

### It Elevates us

“Elevation” refers to the wholesome, warm feeling we experience when witnessing acts of kindness. People who feel elevated are often inspired to perform similar acts of kindness.

Recent studies have shown that expressions of gratitude can lead to feelings of being uplifted, moved, and – in other words, just as witnessing kind acts causes elevation, so does expressing gratitude to others. By elevating ourselves through gratitude, we motivate ourselves to improve our lives, and perhaps also the lives of others.



## It Humbles us

While gratitude does remind us of all the help and support that we have, it also reminds us of the help and support we *need*. By expressing gratitude, we become aware of the fact that we aren't infallible, that we aren't perfect, and that that's okay!

Because gratitude leads to such humility, we become more inclined to seek and accept help for our problems, and to put more effort into accomplishing our goals – instead of trusting an often-misguided sense of confidence that everything will be fine with no intervention on our part.

Lastly, humility also encourages us to repay those people that have helped us, perhaps by helping them in turn.

## It Indebts us

While gratitude certainly leads to positive feelings of elevation, humility, and connectedness, it can also lead to the often-uncomfortable feeling of indebtedness – the feeling that we owe something to the people we're grateful for.

Although indebtedness isn't ordinarily a pleasant emotion, it can serve to motivate us to better ourselves. We have an innate drive to reciprocate acts of kindness or support that we receive from others and “pay off” any perceived debts, even if the people we're indebted to have no such expectations.

Thus, much like the other emotions, feelings of indebtedness possess an important function: They motivate us to be prosocial and to reciprocate kindness. This pro-sociality and reciprocity operates in a feedback loop, encouraging others to continue to offer kindness and support to us because they know they can count on us to do the same.

