

Sue Thompson's

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Attitude of Gratitude

Here it is, the end of January, and I'm still hearing "Happy New Year!" and being reminded that this is a time to start anew, to set goals, and to plan my year. I know this will make some of my goal-setting readers crazy, but I've never been one to set formal goals. I suppose this is a tremendous drawback, because I'm told pithily that "if you don't know where you're going, you don't know how to get there." So let me say that it's not that I don't have goals; it's that my personality style wants to keep certain options open while, as Cat Stevens used to sing, "I'm on the road to find out."

I do have goals, and I'm working toward them. They're in my head, and sometimes I actually write them down. I'm just not very regimented about plans because I appreciate that circumstances are subject to change and I'm ready to roll with them. The thing is, I'm suspending the mad rush to set goals right now and be impeccably responsible about the future. I just want to stop for a bit, breathe, and be grateful.

I'm grateful I made it through 2011 without catastrophe. That's not to say I didn't have some hard days. It wasn't my best year. I faced challenges. I shed a few tears. I fell into a pit, climbed out, and fell in again, but never stayed there for long. I'm grateful for a wonderful husband, a sweet dog, a house that's warm when it's cold and cool in the heat of summer. I'm grateful I wasn't mowed under by the difficulties of life. The truth is, I had some rather lovely moments in 2011, and I'm thankful.

I'm grateful I'm not too old to start over—and by that I mean I don't really believe it's ever too late to start over. There's always someone older than I am doing something marvelous, such as selling everything and moving to a country where they work with children or relief organizations. There's always a story of a 92-year old graduating from college. There's always an example of someone who simply ignored the voices of doom and discouragement around them and said, "I'm going to do it!" So I'm grateful that if I can figure out what I want to do, I can find someone who can help me do it, and I can do it. It's simply ridiculous to say,

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“Nothing good will ever happen to me.” Snap out of it.

I’m grateful that I learned many lessons this past year, and I won’t let them go to waste. I learned more of what I do well and what I don’t. I’ve noted where I need to adjust, and I will. Even in moments of great weakness, I’ve been aware that “this too shall pass” and I’ll bounce back, because I live according to principles and values that are solid and timeless and aren’t affected by my emotions. I stand upon a rock, and the waves beat against it and the wind assaults it and I get pretty drenched sometimes, but the rock remains.

Gratitude is a well-researched characteristic. It’s linked to cardiovascular health and immune functioning and significantly connected to happiness. Those of us who are grateful get a good night’s sleep, make better grades, have better exercise habits, tend to enjoy the work we do, are generally more helpful to people, are optimistic, and—get this!—have greater goal achievement.

The research also tells us we can do things to stir up and strengthen gratitude. Try one of these for a while. You may want to make habits of them:

- Keep a log of good things that happen to you. Jot them down as they occur. Then reflect on them at the end of the day, or week, or in times when your mood is low.
- Before you fall asleep each night, think of three specific things for which you are grateful. If possible, say them out loud.
- Write a note to someone thanking them for something they did for you in the past. You could let someone know how much you appreciate their friendship, or write a former teacher and tell them you’ve not forgotten their influence, or thank a colleague for standing up for you.
- Consider something you’ve taken for granted in your life. (Health? Family? A car that runs? A neighbor’s thoughtfulness? An easy drive to work?) Contemplate it and be attentive to it in the future.

I’m taking just a little time out to get off the goal-making highway. It’s not going anywhere, and I need to be refreshed before I move on. I’m going to smell some flowers and be grateful I’ve got a nose. Won’t you join me? *

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In daily life we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine Monk

I am grateful for what I am and have.
My thanksgiving is perpetual . . .
O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches.
No run on my bank can drain it
for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.

Henry David Thoreau

I'm thankful for a pair of shoes that feel really good on my feet; I like my shoes.

I'm thankful for the birds; I feel like they're singing just for me when I get up in the morning . . . saying, 'Good morning, John. You made it, John.'

I'm thankful for the sea breeze that feels so good right now, and the scent of jasmine when the sun starts going down.
I'm thankful . . .

Johnny Cash

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

Marcel Proust

You cannot be grateful and bitter.
You cannot be grateful and unhappy.
You cannot be grateful and without hope.
You cannot be grateful and unloving.
So just be grateful.

Author Unknown

When you're worried, and you can't sleep, try counting your blessings instead of sheep
And you'll fall asleep counting your blessings.

Irving Berlin

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About Sue

Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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