



mhca's e-Newsletter

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The Power of "Thank You"



As we head into Thanksgiving, I've been giving a lot of thought to the subject of gratitude. With all the fear, frustration and fatigue now permeating our daily lives, in no small part due to the ongoing pandemic, many of us may not be feeling particularly thankful. Fortunately, when we begin to practice gratitude, feelings of thankfulness generally follow.

I speak of gratitude as a practice because, even in the best of times, the seemingly simple act of counting your blessings and expressing genuine thanks to others can seem daunting – it requires conscious, consistent effort. And for leaders it can sometimes feel counter intuitive.

Some leaders feel expressing thanks to others will be viewed as weakness, or that their appreciation should be reserved for the rare occasions when people go above and beyond. They may believe it is unnecessary to thank people who are merely doing their jobs, that their paychecks should be thanks enough. But expressing thanks for people who make your life easier because of the work they do lets them you know that you notice them and value their contributions to the team. People like to work in teams and organizations where they feel valued.

I'm reminded of several recent conversations with members seeking advice on how to boost employee morale and engagement during these particularly trying times. Acknowledgement that your work has value is a major contributor to improved morale, and while some may feel they can't spare the time for gratitude right now, I'd side with **James Allen** who said, "No duty is more urgent than giving thanks." Today's C-suite leaders can't afford to neglect gratitude in today's marketplace where soft skills, like giving people hope and encouragement, are a significant differentiator.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:13 The Bible teaches that we should be thankful in all circumstances, not just when things are going well. This premise has been echoed by great thought leaders the world over for centuries. Why? Because without struggles, we wouldn't have the opportunity to learn, grow and develop new perspectives and deeper trust in one another.

For example, if we'd never had to cancel our in-person conferences, we never would've learned so much so quickly about how to effectively deliver content to members virtually. Delivering our Fall Conference as a one-day virtual event allowed more members to learn and engage while also eliminating travel costs during a tough budget year. It was a valuable learning experience for our team that will result in more opportunities for online member engagement even after the pandemic ends.

More often than not – going through trials makes us stronger individually and collectively. Peggy Terhune recently wrote in Monarch's Reaching Dreams publication, "I would like to think that there is a silver lining in spite of the circumstances that we have endured. It would be how COVID-19 difficulties have propelled mental health to the forefront of national and international discussions."

Leading your team by example to create a culture of gratitude requires some investment of time and effort, but the ROI is compelling. Expressing thankfulness has been scientifically proven to contribute to **improved health and well-being**, and the well-being of leaders as well as employees is a major concern right now.

CJ Davis' concerns for his staff at Burrell Behavioral Health led the organization to launch an initiative to focus on their well-being. What started as a weekly online support group where staff could talk about self-care and provide mutual support grew into a community-wide initiative called BeWell Community – an effort to offer hope, healing and connection during a time of uncertainly and isolation. **mhca** recently hosted a webinar on this initiative and I strongly encourage you to **watch it** at your earliest opportunity.

Cultivating a culture of gratitude at your organization also contributes to feelings of trust and safety, which **increases collaboration and innovation**.

The upcoming holiday season can be lonely and stressful even in the best of times...in 2020, it threatens to be unbearable. If you want to build resiliency, improve employee morale and cultivate a more collaborative and innovative culture in your organization, practicing gratitude can be the game changer you're looking for. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Schedule time each day to reflect on things that went well, consider keeping a gratitude journal
- Find ways to express your gratitude to others – such as offering specific rather than general praise to them either in front of their peers or in a hand-written thank you note
- Provide time during meetings for connection and ask team members to share something they are grateful for, something positive that happened, or if they'd like to take a moment to thank a colleague

For more ideas on how you can express gratitude to your team, see [40 Great Ways to Say Thank You to Your Employees](#).

Kiara Kuenzler recently wrote in the Jefferson Center Community Connection, "Through our forced distance, we have recognized just how strong our need to come together is and how difficult it is to meet the demands of this life without support from others. Our desire for human connection, and our need for hope, crosses all dividing lines." I couldn't have said it better myself.

I am grateful for the unique contributions each member of **mhca** brings to our association and for the opportunities we have to learn and grow together. Being apart has been hard, but absence truly does make the heart grow fonder. I look forward to seeing you all in-person again soon. Until then, Happy Thanksgiving.



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