



Knowing the power of a gratitude attitude

Patricia Kitchen | Change@work
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I get a little uneasy anytime I'm writing about a subject that could be considered just a tad on the wussy side - like this one, which looks at the value of counting your blessings. After all, that practice seems in direct opposition to a common default pastime: tallying up, obsessing over and commenting on all that's going wrong with our day, job, commute, family, town, state, country, planet.

The good news here is that no one is telling us not to take on those worries - only to let go just a smidge by making it a point, every day and in writing, to note and appreciate the small things, no matter how minute, that made our day go just a bit better.

For me those would be things like: In Manhattan, I got a cab in the rain; I got a cab at rush hour; and what would rise to hallelujah status - I got a cab in the rain at rush hour.

No one is saying that keeping a gratitude list is going to make life's miseries go away. Instead, the point seems to be that those often-overlooked small pleasantries serve as a sort of speed bump on the heartbreak highway - slowing us down, opening our minds to different and better solutions, reassuring us that happy, lovely things do exist alongside the roadkill.

This is one of the messages in television news anchor Deborah Norville's new book, "Thank You Power: Making the Science of Gratitude Work for You" (Thomas Nelson, \$19.99). In it, she says that such a list "does not make you immune to the cares and perplexities of daily life." But those who practice gratitude, according to researchers she quotes, "got over their hassles faster" and "broadened their mind-sets."

Still, I am wondering about type-A personalities - with A in our region standing for attitude. So I put the question to Norville at the seventh annual Gratitude Breakfast held Monday in Manhattan by the New York Women in Communications Foundation: Just how big a leap do New Yorkers have to make?

"No leap," she said, pointing to the heavy-hitter endorsers of her book, who include Donald Trump himself.

New Yorkers like to cultivate that tough-guy or -gal veneer, she said. But like people elsewhere, they take note of what goes right and where they get support. The big difference, she said, is that New Yorkers are not necessarily going to be broadcasting the fact they track and appreciate life's little pleasantries, while those in Atlanta - well, as she put it, "they'll put it in your face."

One member of the breakfast crowd, Holly Koenig, a vice president of the Kellen Co., an association management firm in Manhattan, said that she can relate to Norville's message. In fact, she and her mother, Beverly Munter, 74, a vice president at American Dental Centers in Hicksville, are taking some girl time next week on Paradise Island in the Bahamas - and bringing copies of the "Thank You Power" book with them.

"Mom taught me at a young age when I had some medical setbacks to persevere," says Koenig, 49, of Westbury.

And, OK, I'll admit it: I, too, just had occasion to appreciate a warm and funny moment in the middle of great unhappiness - the hospitalization of my 87-year-old mother's beloved dog Holly, a papillon we rescued six years ago.

Sunday night, as I returned from my mother's home in Massachusetts, I was settled on the Logan Express bus to the airport when the driver noticed I appeared to be upset. She told me to spill it - after all, it's not good to keep things in.

So I told the story to her and the one other passenger, a young television producer returning to a gig in Miami. We ended up talking about the delight we get from pets and moved on to issues related to family dynamics. We wound up in a goofy conversation, wondering if we could commandeer the bus and head to Foxwoods for a turn at the casino tables.

When I hopped off at the Delta Shuttle, I thanked them both for the ride on the therapy bus. It didn't remove my sorrow, or the grief at Holly's death the next day, but it did remind me of, with a nod to Blanche DuBois, the power and pleasure of the kindness of strangers.

And that's something I'll be adding to my gratitude list.