Happy New Year!

This edition of the Sand Paper is focused on gratitude. That fundamental emotion that helps us move to a higher, loftier, place in our thinking. As a young child, my mother taught me early in life to seek thoughts of gratitude in times when I was feeling blue, when I felt I had less than another, or when life seemed difficult. She simply told me to “Count your blessings.” Her message to seek thoughts of thankfulness for what I have versus dwelling on what I do not have, is a profound teaching that has served me well and, through me, continues as wisdom for others.

Over the years, when people have experienced the loss of a loved one, a job change, the loss of a dream, or the feeling they have nothing left, I have gently encouraged their change of view and the change of thought to looking at what is still present in their lives with a simple question, “What are you grateful for?” Thinking about this answer changes the flow of thinking to possibilities and hopefulness.

In planning this edition of the Sand Paper, as usual, our editorial team met to brainstorm ideas. We came up with the idea of each writer taking a few gratitude quotes and writing on those expressed ideas. This is fun and creative work. I hope you find thoughts of value to your life in our writing.

Sand Creek celebrates our 25th anniversary in business this quarter. We are most grateful for having had the opportunity to serve so many individuals and their families over this past quarter of a century. Each time a person reaches out to Sand Creek for help in addressing a challenge in their work life or personal life, we are deeply honored to be able to help.

Joan Sirotiak and I, as owners of Sand Creek, want to offer a heartfelt thank you to our customers, clients, staff, providers and all who have supported our work in the world throughout the years. Thank you.
“When we focus on our gratitude, the tide of disappointment goes out and the tide of love rushes in.” Kristin Armstrong

What are you focusing on? When you wake in the morning what are your first thoughts? And what do your thoughts travel to when you sit down to work, or are fixing your lunch? We can get stuck in a rut of noticing what we perceive to be lacking more than what we actually have. This can show up in many ways. Examples include wishing for a larger home, fancier car, kids to behave better, relief for a sore back, or a spouse that ‘listens’ to you.

What do you focus on that fuels disappointment in your life? The negative or fear filled things that we focus on gain power simply by the focus we place on them. They get more of our attention, energy and thus leave less for all of the things we are grateful for. These thoughts also create neural connections in our brain. These neural connections grow the more they are used – the more we think those thoughts, the easier they are to automatically think, and the more difficult, different thoughts are to think and access with ease. However, focusing on what we are grateful for challenges this pattern and can change it. Truly we cannot be grateful and disappointed simultaneously.

Challenge your disappointed thought with a grateful thought, or several. I believe this new attitude not only will create new neural connections for you to more easily access, but also bring feelings of peace and increase what you see, and notice, what you are grateful for.

Contributed by: Erica Kanewischer, Ph.D., LMFT

“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

I love this quote from Emerson. He basically reminds us that all things we encounter on our life’s journey are on our path for our highest good. This is a hard idea to swallow sometimes when considering that illness, emotional pain, heartache, loss and even death can be described as good. Perhaps better understood if we use Emerson’s words that these challenges in life “contribute to our advancement”. I know I am a better person for having lived through many difficulties in my life. I have learned empathy, compassion, patience, forgiveness and understanding for walking through my own dark nights or walking beside a loved one who is in pain or filled with fear.

Imagine how uplifted we all would be if we gave thanks always for everything, continuously. I hold the following cherished quote in my memory. It supports this thinking. It is from Meister Eckhart, German theologian, philosopher and mystic. He said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” Thank you.

Contributed by: Gretchen M. Stein, Ph.D., CEAP
"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." — Albert Einstein

Dr. Vincent Norman Peale wrote a book in 1952 called, "The Power of Positive Thinking." In the preface, he shares that while the practice of reconditioning our minds towards optimism and gratitude is difficult and requires great discipline, it also comes with, "great joy to the person who achieves victory over himself and the difficult circumstances of this world."

Studies in the field of positive psychology reflect that optimism is associated with many positive life outcomes including longer life expectancy, better health, improved mental health, increased success in sports and work, greater recovery rates from heart operations and better coping strategies when faced with adversity. While on the flip side, pessimism is associated with poorer physical health, strained relationships (both work and personal), higher blood pressure and greater anxiety and depression. When we are optimistic, we exist in a place of hope and the potential to feel helpless is stopped, whereas when we are pessimistic, it has been shown to actually spread the feeling of hopelessness to others around us.

The above quote by Albert Einstein perfectly describes the choice between optimism and pessimism. In life, we will experience hardship, setbacks and tragedy and yet we are posed with the choice to exercise our ability to be resilient and steadfast in our difficulties or to allow them to dominate our thinking. These two choices define the nature of our experiences in our daily lives which ultimately shapes our character.

All too often it is easy to allow the challenges and the periodic “bad breaks” of our lives take priority over our thoughts to the degree that our entire existence seems to be reactive and solely based on daily survival, both mental and emotional. Our thought patterns become infused with a sense of foreboding about when the ‘next shoe will drop’ and we find our attitudes becoming leveraged around the habit of negative thinking, towards ourselves and the world in general.

It begins with the notion that to become more hopeful and optimistic we need to be mindful.

Here are some areas to consider as you work to assess your level of optimism or pessimism:

**Self Awareness** – We can’t manipulate what we can’t measure. Being aware of our thinking is a vital beginning to understanding ourselves better. Start noticing your thoughts throughout the day. What is your first thought or emotion when faced with something outside your control? How do you respond when something happens that poses a slight difficulty during your day? Notice if you’re tendency is to be judgmental and critical, or supportive and empathetic.

**Slow Down** – A component of optimism is the ability to recognize the miracle that is life in all its extraordinary wonder in everyday ordinary things. Go for a walk, notice the air on your face. Notice the trees, pay attention to sounds. Experience things around you in mindful practice using all your senses. (Tip: You can do this anywhere).

**Put Optimism to the Test** – Practice being joy filled, enthusiastic, and hopeful. Begin each day with a positive proclamation to yourself, or to someone you care about. Take the inertia into your workday, or weekend. Smile, greet others; help those that might need a helping hand. And, all the while, pay attention to how this makes you feel, not to mention the fact that you’re impacting the world around you in a very positive way.

Becoming a person that is filled with the glow of optimism will draw others near to you, people will find themselves seeking you out and connections and relationships will deepen and grow. We really only have two choices each day. Which one will you make?

*Contributed by: DJ Enga*
"Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgiving, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings." William Arthur Ward

Do you remember applying for your job? For some of our readers that could be thirty years ago, others three days ago, but for most of us somewhere in between. Do you remember thinking you would be a good fit for the job requirements? Do you also recall having a strong desire to win this job? When you heard you got the job did you call someone close to you to share in the celebration of this wonderful news perhaps exclaiming “I got the job!”?

Today when you woke up to go to work, did you still have the same enthusiasm? Did you say to yourself with the same level of excitement, “How wonderful, I still have the job!”? Chances are probably not. For most of us once we acquire a dream, it loses its luster.

“Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgiving, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.” William Arthur Ward

This quote by William Arthur Ward speaks to the actions to put that luster back into your work and your work life. Turn your common days into days of thanksgiving by stopping to appreciate what you have and continue to receive daily from this important aspect of a satisfying life.

Our jobs bring us many ways to express our purpose in the world. Take a few moments each day to think about all that comes to you in a positive way because you have this job. Turning your job into joy is a mere thought away, if the thought is one of thanksgiving.

Contributed by: Gretchen M. Stein, Ph.D., CEAP

"Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses." Alphonse Karr

Do you know a "yeah, but..." person? That comment can often take a positive reflection or situation and point out an undesirable aspect of it, which sours the whole thing. This is metaphorically pointing out the thorns instead of admiring the roses.

Sam: “That was a lovely concert, I’m glad we got to go.”
Nellie: “Yeah, but did you hear the guy down the row from us coughing the whole time? Now we’ll all get sick.”

Mom: “Did you have a good time at the birthday party?”
Kid: “Yeah, but Megan got way more presents than I did at my party. I want another party.”

You get the picture. These situations show up all the time. And of course sometimes a valid complaint needs to be aired. The complaint could be shared however, in a way that does not negate the good in the situation.

There are so many opportunities to see the roses when there are thorns. Examples include when your whole family has a bad cold together, but get to lay around and watch movies. When a whole day seems to be going wrong, but a friend brings you coffee. When the results of a new project aren’t turning out, but you realize you’ve learned everything not to do. Sometimes we have to search deeply for the roses when we feel surrounded by thorns. But, they are there and noticing makes the experience much more bearable.

Contributed by: Erica Kanewischer, Ph.D., LMFT
DEAR SAND CREEK,

“This a wonderful day. I’ve never seen this one before.” – Maya Angelou

Happy New Year! I loved the idea for your ‘Gratitude’ issue of the Sand Paper and was honored that you would ask me for my favorite gratitude quote, it was fun!

I chose the one above by American poet and civil rights activist, Dr. Maya Angelou. I have a book of her poetry sitting in my office and periodically I’ll read a poem, because it always gives me a sense of levity and hope.

Her ten words above perfectly encapsulate hope, curiosity and gratitude. I’ve worked hard in my practice of gratitude to approach each day as a sacred gift, brand new, with wonder and potential all laid bare before me. Her quote invites us to take a chance and look around at things we haven’t seen before.

Seeing the same thing in a new way, has that ever happened to you? Perhaps you’ve noticed on your drive home – one that you take five days a week – how the light falls on the horizon or bends around the landscape in such a way that it felt like it was done only for you, at the one moment the landscape you see every day looks completely different? Same road, same traffic, same road signs, but the sunset, that’s different, and then it’s gone as quickly as it came.

In this New Year, I would challenge you readers to take a moment to realize that our attitude (both good or bad) tends to be directly related to the kinds of experiences we end up having. If you expect to see the same thing, that’s what will happen. Or, expect to enter the day with the notion that you will see wonder and awe, and believe it or not, wonder and awe will be laid before your feet.

Peace be with you, and have a wonderful 2019!

Sandy

Send your Dear Sandy Questions to info@sandcreekeap.com
### About Sand Creek

**Workplace Wellness**

Sand Creek is a women-owned small business specializing in providing exceptional workplace wellness services to support the human spirit at work. We embrace our core values of service, hope, trust, compassion, and wisdom in each interaction, thereby upholding our mission of providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining a light in the darkest of moments.

Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to offer face-to-face counseling and consulting to those that voluntarily reach out to us. We are not simply a phone counseling service or online tool type EAP. Thousands of professional counselors form a worldwide Sand Creek network available to deliver personal care and support to you in your community. Our services are administered nationally, but delivered locally.

Sand Creek supports the relationship between individual health and overall organizational health. Our Organization Assistance Program (OAP) service extends the reach into the organization and provides work teams with a systemic approach to improve the health and well-being of an organization.