

Views from VanDeWalle

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Practicing Gratitude

One of my goals for 2021 was to be better about practicing gratitude. I have heard from colleagues they keep a gratitude journal to help them reminder all they have to be thankful for. I am happy to say that I purchased one and am mostly diligent about writing in it, but still have room to improve. When difficult things happen that we can't explain, it can be hard to cope. I searched for ways gratitude can help us in tough times and found a lot of research and science behind how practicing gratitude can help. A team of 15 researchers and mental health practitioners runs a website, positivepsychology.com which I've decided to share some tips on handling difficult situations.

As I write this, the Nebraska Extension community is grieving the loss of a respected member of our team, Leanne Manning. Leanne was an extension educator at the Saline County office since 1988. She not only taught me about 4-H as I grew up and help me excel in many areas but was a mentor for me in my professional career as a Nebraska Extension educator. While many of across the system have been struggling with her passing, I felt inclined to dedicate this article to her and share ways to cope with grief by practicing gratitude.

Psychologists have defined gratitude as a positive emotional response that we perceive on giving or receiving a benefit from someone (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). You might have heard the expression that "it is better to give than to receive". This reminds me of gratitude. Gratitude can actually enlighten the mind and make us feel happier. Research documents physical, social and psychological benefits from expressing gratitude on a regular basis. Gratitude improves interpersonal relationships at home and work (Gordon, 2012). The connection between gratitude and happiness is multi-dimensional. Expressing gratitude not only to others but also to ourselves, induces positive emotions, primarily happiness.

A study by Moll, Zahn, et al. 2007 showed that the effect of practicing gratitude on the brain is long lasting. For example, it releases toxic emotions, reduces pain, improves sleep quality, aids in stress regulation and reduces anxiety and depression. Positivepsychology.com has tips on "Gratitude and Grief". First, the article says to cry your heart out; crying doesn't make us weak. This helps us vent to the pain we are experiencing. Secondly, collect the broken pieces. In other words, grieving with gratitude allows us to appreciate what we still have (job, family, etc.). Also, ask for help; it is ok to seek professional help when all other of your coping mechanisms fail. Finally, keep a gratitude jar. This can be a glass jar or clean box with paper beside it. Place one sheet of paper in the container every day to express what you are grateful for that day. As the container is fuller, you will feel more gifted and hopeful.

This is not to say that grief is easy to handle, rather providing strategies to gain and strength to look beyond it. I am truly blessed and honored to have known Leanne Manning as "my" extension educator growing up and also as a mentor and colleague in my current professional role.

Ag Safety Day

Mark your calendars for the annual Progressive Agriculture Safety Day for youth currently in grades 1-6th. This will be held at the Fillmore County Fairgrounds in Geneva on May 27th. Details



and registration available on our website at fillmore.unl.edu or call the office for more details at (402) 759-3712.

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