



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Practicing Gratitude

Leading an organization through any type of significant change gives you an opportunity to really get to know people. In my previous line of work, even the mention of change would bring out the best — and the worst — in people. In one particularly tense meeting early in my tenure, Yvonne asked the group to stop and reflect on all of the reasons we had as an organization to be grateful. The mood lifted. The bickering stopped. The complaining morphed into encouragement. What Yvonne understood and brought to the table is the reality that gratitude has the power — for individuals and organizations — to transform challenging situations into opportunities for growth.

The National Council on Aging recognizes the power of gratitude and includes it, along with mindfulness, as one of the six dimensions of aging well. Dr. Susan Stiles notes, “By practicing gratitude over time, we can learn to notice and appreciate not only the positives, but also develop better attitudes about the negatives...the challenges, losses, and frustrations that we all face as we age. Adopting an attitude of gratitude means tackling the negative things and challenging ourselves to find ways to be grateful for them.”

Harvard Health, the publishing arm of the Harvard Medical School, highlights several studies in positive psychology that link gratitude with healthy aging. These studies have found that “gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.”

The month of November, with Thanksgiving celebrations and gatherings of family and friends, provides an ideal time to reflect on those things for which we are truly grateful. Several years ago, I was challenged by a friend to use November

as an opportunity to not only be mindful of my reasons for gratitude, but also to practice gratitude with daily acts of acknowledgment. It was, and continues to be, an opportunity to:

- Write a note to a colleague or professor to tell them about the impact they have made on my life
- Give a gift to a favorite charity (this year I am including an extra gift to the PSRC annual campaign) in honor of a family member or friend
- Pick up the phone and call someone from my life’s journey to simply say, “thank you”
- Acknowledge with a note — or an extra tip — the service workers, such as gas station attendants or restaurant servers or house cleaners, who regularly care for the little things in my life

Throughout this month, I’d like to offer you a simple challenge. Each and every day, do one extra act to practice gratitude in your life. Every day. No exceptions. For 30 days. At the end of the month, send me a note to let me know about your experience. Pay attention to how your acts of gratitude impact others around you. But also pay attention to how you feel throughout this journey. I trust that you will feel the impact gratitude has on your health and overall well-being. I also have a hunch that practicing a month of gratitude will lead to the development of a habit that will ripple well beyond November — and will positively impact your life for years to come. I look forward to hearing your stories!

All the Best,
Drew A. Dyson, PhD
Executive Director