

GIVING THANKS IS THE KEY TO TRANSFORM THINGS THAT HAPPENED INTO GOOD THINGS AND POSITIVE EMOTIONS

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Abstract

Barbara L. Fredrickson (1998) posits that joy, interest, contentment, and love positive emotions serve to broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, which in turn has the effect of building that individual's physical, intellectual, and social resources. Experiences of certain positive emotions prompt individuals to discard time-tested or automatic (everyday) behavioral scripts and to pursue novel, creative, and often unscripted paths of thought and action. This study explored how to transform things that happened into good things. By inviting 24 participants to write weekly or bi-weekly "Something good happened" in my "Principles of Teaching" course for 8 weeks. PERMA was used to analyze all "something good happened" statements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Words such as *thanks*, *fortunately*, *feeling good*, *happy*, *feeling warm*, and *relaxed* were classified as positive emotions. Words like "thanks" were further analyzed by what things happened to the participants. The result showed that "giving thanks" is the key to transforming things that happened into GOOD things and positive emotions. There might be routine or tough things happening. However, by giving thanks, things will turn into good things that we appreciate, and then produce positive emotions.

Keywords: *Giving thanks, grateful, positive emotion, tough thing, something good happened.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Why viewing interactions in a more optimistic and positive lens may be beneficial

Fredrickson (1998) posits that joy, interest, contentment, and love positive emotions serve to broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, which in turn has the effect of building that individual's physical, intellectual, and social resources. Experiences of certain positive emotions prompt individuals to discard time-tested or automatic (everyday) behavioral scripts and to pursue novel, creative, and often unscripted paths of thought and action.

When people confront adversity or difficulty, they experience a variety of emotions, ranging from excitement and eagerness to anger, anxiety, and depression. The balance among these feelings appears to relate to people's degree of optimism or pessimism. Optimists are people who expect to have positive outcomes, even when things are hard. This confidence should yield a mix of feelings that is relatively positive. Pessimists expect negative outcomes. This doubt should yield a greater tendency toward negative feelings—*anxiety, guilt, anger, sadness, or despair* (Scheier & Carver, 1992).

Relationships between optimism and distress have been examined in diverse groups of people facing difficulty or adversity. Aspinwall & Taylor (1992) examined students making their adjustment to their first semester of college. Optimism, self-esteem, and other variables were assessed when the students first arrived on campus. Measures of psychological and physical wellbeing were obtained at the end of the semester. Higher levels of optimism upon entering college predicted lower levels of psychological distress at the end of the semester. The relationship was independent of effects of self-esteem, locus of control, desire for control, and baseline mood (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

Both gratitude and optimism can serve as coping mechanisms during challenging times. Expressing thanks for the positive aspects of a situation, even in difficult times, can help individuals find silver linings and maintain a hopeful outlook for the future (Scheier & Carver, 1992).

1.2. Approaching complex situations or interactions in a more optimistic manner may have positive outcomes

Studies have shown that practicing gratitude is linked to improved well-being, increased life satisfaction, and reduced symptoms of depression. Similarly, optimism is associated with better mental health, increased resilience, and a more positive approach to life's challenges (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

In one experiment, 4-year-old children were randomly assigned to recall an emotional or non-emotional experience from their lives before doing a learning task (Masters, Barden, & Ford, 1979). The experimental manipulation crossed three levels of affect (positive, neutral, negative) with two levels of tempo (active and passive). The positive affect, active tempo condition resembled joy ("Can you remember something that happened to you that made you feel so happy that you just wanted to jump up and down?"), whereas the positive affect, passive tempo condition resembled contentment ("... so happy that you just wanted to sit and smile?"). Children were given 30 seconds to recall and think about their assigned memory before learning a shape discrimination task. Both passive and active positive emotion conditions produced significantly faster mastery of the task compared to all other conditions (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 310).

Similar experimental studies have yielded comparable results among students ranging from elementary to high school, and for those with and without learning disabilities (Bryan & Bryan, 1991; Bryan, Mathur, & Sullivan, 1996; Yasutake & Bryan, 1995). Remarkably, simply asking students to think for less than 1 minute of a happy moment from their lives before learning or test taking produces significant increases in intellectual gains and performance (Barbara L. Fredrickson, 1998, p. 311).

Giving thanks is a positive emotion or attitude involving the recognition and appreciation of the good things, people, experiences, or aspects of life. It involves acknowledging and being thankful for the positive elements in one's life, whether they are big or small. Giving thanks fosters optimism. When individuals focus on what they are thankful for, it tends to shift their perspective towards the positive aspects of their experiences. This shift in perspective contributes to a more optimistic outlook on life, as individuals become more attuned to the good things happening around them (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

2. Purpose of this study

This study explored how university students transform things that happened into GOOD things and Positive emotions.

3. Method

By inviting 24 participants to write weekly or bi-weekly "Something good happened" in the author's "Principles of Teaching" course for 8 weeks. The author used PERMA model to analyze all "something good happened" statements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Words such as *thanks*, *fortunately*, *happy*, *feeling good*, *happy*, *warm*, and *relaxed* were classified as positive emotions. Words like *thanks* were further analyzed by what things happened to the participants.

4. Results

The result showed that "giving thanks" is the key to transforming things that happened into GOOD things and positive emotions. There might be routine or tough things happening. However, by giving thanks, things will turn into good things that we appreciate, and then produce positive emotions. Table 1 showed by giving thanks that routine things happened transform to something GOOD happened.

Table 1. Routine things happened transform to something GOOD happened.

Something happened (routine things)	Key	Something GOOD happened
1. Teachers help students to practice their non-elective question answering skills	Giving Thanks	<i>Thanks</i> to the teachers in the department who are willing to take time to help students in the master's class who are preparing to take the teacher qualified test this year to practice their non-elective question answering skills, which has helped me to get a better grasp of the direction when I originally didn't know how to prepare for the test.

2. Teachers answered my questions	Giving Thanks	I would like to thank the teachers who answered many of my questions this week. I know that the speed and effectiveness of my learning is very slow, but I am deeply <i>grateful</i> to them for their willingness to answer my questions without complaining , and for helping me to regain the joy of learning , and I am so glad to have you all!
3. Service learning	Giving Thanks	There were a lot of service-learning opportunities to participate in this week. Although I was physically tired and had a small cold during the week, I was <i>grateful</i> for the opportunity to learn and practice different ways of dealing with children and adults .
4. Digital learning companion	Giving Thanks	This week is the opening week of the Digital Learning Companion, I am very happy that my elementary school companion is happy to see that I am the one who takes him again, and he interacts with me very well, and he even said that he wants me to take him to the end of his third year of study. I am <i>grateful</i> to my elementary school companion's words and reactions, which convinced me that my decision is not wrong, and let me know that there are people who are looking forward to me and are happy about it, so that I can forget about the worries of life gradually, and pick up my smile to continue to walk on the road of education with perseverance.
5. It didn't rain	Giving Thanks	<i>Thanks</i> to today's weather, it didn't rain when I rode back to school from my house! It also didn't rain when I participated in the Wilderness Program, which made the event go smoothly , and it didn't rain when I had to go out to eat with my friends after the event, and it didn't start raining until I got to the dormitory, so I didn't get caught in the rain!
6. Storytelling	Giving Thanks	<i>Thanks</i> to the Association for giving me the opportunity to interact with children in storytelling, I have a feeling that my dream is getting closer and closer . I also thank my family, friends and teachers for their support during the process of growing up, so that I can also have the opportunity to teach others.
7. Have breakfast with my mom	Giving Thanks	<i>Thanks</i> to my mother quitting the job that she had worked for ten years, the empty home began to come to life. Today, I woke up early and went to a nearby breakfast place with my mom to enjoy breakfast, which was ordinary but very happy .
8. My parents gave birth to me	Giving Thanks	Although my family did not provide any assistance for college, either mentally or materially, I am still <i>grateful</i> to my parents for giving birth to me and giving me the opportunity to work hard to make myself complete, so that I can have the ability to enrich my life by studying in my favorite field at this very moment, and I believe that everything is for the best .

Table 2 showed by giving thanks that tough things happened transform to something GOOD happened.

Table 2. Tough things happened transform to something GOOD happened.

Something happened (tough things)	Key	Something GOOD happened
9. My father was hospitalized for a stroke	Giving Thanks	Last January, my father was hospitalized for a stroke. On 4/1, I was suddenly notified by the nursing staff that my father's blood oxygen level had suddenly dropped to 60, so he was sent to the emergency room. Luckily, the oxygen level stabilized after a few hours of observation at the hospital, so I felt more relieved and was able to return to the convalescent center. This year, my family and I look back at how we felt at that moment and can

		only say that God was having an April Fool's Day, too! We <i>thank</i> God for allowing us to be with our dad.
10. It's been more than a year since my father's collapse	Giving Thanks	4/3~4/9 In the past, my dad would go back to my hometown in Taichung to visit the graves with my uncle on Ching Ming Festival, but last year, due to my dad's unexpected situation, my brother went back to help on behalf of my dad, and this year, it was my turn to go back. In the evening, I sat in the living room with my uncle and aunt and chatted with them. During the conversation, many childhood memories were mentioned, which made me miss the carefree times in the past, and also made me realize how hard my parents had worked to bring us up in the beginning. It's been more than a year since my father's collapse, and I originally chose to take a break from school to look for a job, but I'm really <i>thankful to my mom for insisting on letting me finish my master's degree during such a difficult time.</i>
11. I didn't play well with badminton	Giving Thanks	This Saturday is the Emperor Cup Badminton Tournament. In fact, I have not been feeling very good these two days. And I was very nervous on the court. I didn't play well. But I am very <i>thankful</i> to my teammates. They not only didn't blame me, but also encouraged me all the time. They also helped me to overcome my mistakes on the field. They made me feel happy to be able to play with these guys on the team. They are partners, teammates and family. And I hope that in the future I can continue to work hard. I hope that in the future I can continue to work hard to become a better person. I hope I can continue to work hard to become a better person. I hope that one day I can become a guardian of others!
12. To see my grandma for the last time	Giving Thanks	Although my emotions are painful and shocking, I still want to be <i>grateful</i> that I have no regrets, and I am grateful that all my family members who are still around me are still healthy and safe.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. What is learned

The results of this study showed giving thanks is the key to transforming things that happened into good things and positive emotion. This finding is according with the study of Emmons and Stern (2013):

The initial step of a gratitude practice is attention, an awareness of the good that one might normally take for granted : in this study case 1. teachers help students to practice their non-elective question answering skills; 2. teachers answered my questions; 3. service learning; 4. digital learning companion; and 6. Storytelling. Then tuning in to the many reasons to be grateful that already exists in this study case 5. It didn't rain; 7. Have breakfast with my mom; and 8. My parents gave birth to me.

Directing attention in this manner is helpful for blocking out thoughts and emotions that are incompatible with a gratitude practice: in this study case 9. My father was hospitalized for a stroke; 10. It's been more than a year since my father's collapse; 11. I didn't play well with badminton; and 12. To see my grandma for the last time. These four cases also in line with g to. According to Ryff and Singer (1996), self-acceptance is one of the six categories of psychological well-being. Self-acceptance is associated with a positive attitude toward the self, acknowledging and accepting both good and bad qualities. Others may feel dissatisfaction with the self and with the past, possibly wishing to be different than what they are.

5.2. What to be learned

This is a pilot study by analyzing college students' "something good happened" statements, to show the possible key to transform things that happened into good things and positive emotion might be gratitude. The potential benefits for students to keep on reflecting and writing something good, happened statement and the strength to focus on good things then become more optimistic need further study.

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