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Appreciation Works - By Dr Noelle Nelson

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Things just have not been going well at work lately. A new co-worker is kissing up to the boss and the boss is eating it up. You can see your shot at a promotion going swiftly down the drain. Your "task list" (who comes up with these PC cover-ups for more work, anyway?) is ever increasing, and your unpaid overtime along with it. And then you come home. Well, you sort of come home. Your car bumps along in need of repair, or the train is so crowded you can barely breathe. When you finally turn the key in the lock of your home sweet home, you're greeted by a pile of bills, chores you don't want to do and a cranky spouse who is just as overworked as you.

What happened to feeling good? What happened to the joy of being alive? Why is work such a pain and your relationships too much like work? Why do you feel 150 years old when you're just getting going in life?

Because you're too busy focusing on everything that's going wrong rather than appreciating what's going right. Because with your every depressed thought, your brain responds by releasing chemicals into your bloodstream that support your mood. Because, as quantum physics has so elegantly demonstrated, like attracts like. Thinking about the things that make you depressed, makes you more depressed. If you gave as much thought to those things that bring you joy, your brain would respond by releasing chemicals into your bloodstream that support your mood, and joy would breed more joy. Plus, your heart would function better and your stress levels would decrease.

"Oh, great!" you say, "Plaster a phony smile on my face. Pretend everything's wonderful. Wow, there's an enlightened solution!" The point is not to deny what's going on: the new employee is sucking up to the boss, you are buried by work, and your spouse is cranky sometimes. The point is not to dwell on it, not to make it the focal point of your every waking thought. Look instead for what you can value and appreciate, for that will set a completely new dynamic

into motion. You see, appreciation isn't just another word for gratitude. Appreciation is an energy, like gravity and electricity, with tremendous impact that has been proven scientifically. You can harness that energy for your success and well being by focusing on what you can value (the most important aspect of appreciation) and what you can be grateful for in any given situation.

The new employee is sucking up to the boss, so? You don't have to think of it as a threat. You can value the new employee as a positive challenge to your own motivation and a reminder to do your best work and be more proactive about getting that promotion.

You're given more work to do, so? Appreciate that the boss actually thinks you can do it. Learn boundary-setting techniques, as in: "Which project would you prefer I put aside in order to do this new project? Project A or project B?" which will make the boss pause. Or you can become motivated to be more efficient so you can actually do all the work asked of you.

You have a pile of bills to pay? Who doesn't? Think about the benefit of what you're paying for and appreciate that - whether it's the roof over your head, your now fixed car, or that cool new jacket that makes you look, well - cool. Value and be grateful for your present ability to pay your bills and appreciate your future ability to pay more.

Your spouse is cranky? Like you never are? Ignore the cranky part, and find something to openly appreciate about him or her, even something as basic as "I'm glad you're in my life," or "Thank you for working so hard." Or just show your appreciation by making his or her favorite dinner or planning a special night out filled with his or her favorite activities.

Finding the joy in life is easy. Feeling upbeat, motivated and good about yourself the majority of the time is easy. No, these aren't Pollyanna statements, they're scientifically demonstrable facts. All it takes is a willingness to choose how you look at a situation, to deliberately seek what you can value about it and allow the negative stuff to take a back seat. And practice--lots of practice at thinking appreciative thoughts, because most of us are so much more used to fixating on what brings us down. In the end, what's more fun - practicing misery or practicing appreciation?

Try it! You may surprise yourself at just how powerfully appreciation works.

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., known as "Dr. Noelle" to her clients, is a respected psychologist, consultant and author. Her most recent books is "The Power of Appreciation: The Key to a Vibrant Life" (with co-author, Jeannine LeMare Calaba, Psy.D.; Beyond Words, 2003). For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives with her "compassionate psychotherapy." Dr. Noelle welcomes your comments via email (nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com). You can visit Dr. Noelle anytime at www.dr.noellenelson.com.