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Episode 60 - Top 10 Ways To Become More Grateful From The Leading Expert on Gratitude and Happiness

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Jonathan Hunsaker: Welcome, everyone, to another episode of Empowering You Organically. I'm your host, Jonathan Hunsaker, joined by my co-host, TeriAnn Trevenen.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Hey, everyone!

Jonathan Hunsaker: So, we are continuing the conversation today about gratitude. Last week, we had a podcast where we were talking about the science behind gratitude, how it can really change your wellbeing for the better, both emotionally, psychologically, even physically. And there's been some questions about how to become more grateful. And so, we put together a top 10 list, and we're going to go over that right now with you.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yep, 'tis the season right now to be grateful. Thanksgiving is a time where we practice gratitude, we think about gratitude, we try to feel more gratitude, but in a world that's becoming increasingly focused on the materialistic side of things, I think we fail to really celebrate the season for what it's actually meant for.

And so, we talked last week about how gratitude can help us to be happier, to help us to have stronger and more powerful emotions on the positive side, it can help us physically, mentally, and emotionally. And so, these top 10 ways to become more grateful are hopefully exercises and tips that can help you to get more into the spirit of gratitude this holiday season, not only for Thanksgiving, but beyond, and just in your everyday life.

So, last week, we talked about an expert in the gratitude field, Robert Emmons, who has a PhD and is the leading scientific expert on gratitude, shares a lot of really good information, some of which we shared last week in the podcast, but he is a Professor of Psychology at the University of California – Davis and the founding Editor-In-Chief of the Journal of Positive Psychology. He has authored many books around gratitude and happiness and emotions and positivity, and this is his top 10 list for becoming more grateful.

So, kicking it off with number one – keep a gratitude journal. Establish a daily practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy. Setting aside time on a daily basis to recall moments of gratitude, associated with ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life, give you the potential to interweave a sustainable life theme of gratefulness.

And this is not something I practice as often as I probably should. I feel and think about gratitude each morning, but it's definitely something that, as I sometimes sit down and journal and write about my life, and write thoughts and feelings, I definitely see the benefit of writing out how you feel and going back later when you're having a hard day and reading what you felt at certain times sometimes will help you realize how blessed you are, sometimes to help you realize how far you've come.

Like I think writing gratitude, in whatever form you write it in, can really be beneficial for yourself and for other people, your posterity down the road, to see how you felt about life.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Well, just the exercise of writing gets you more present to what's going on in life, it has you focus more on it, and I think it actually makes it a little bit more real when you write it down and you're thinking about it, you're thinking about "How am I going to write this? How am I going to express these feelings and these emotions? And how do I talk about it?" And you have to think about putting it into the written word. It just makes it that much more real, gets you that much more present and allows you to really work through it.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Absolutely. Number two – remember the bad. We talked about this a little bit in the last podcast. To be grateful in your current state, it is helpful to remember the hard times that you once experienced. When you remember how difficult life used to be and how far you have come, you set up an explicit contrast in your mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratefulness.

I am a huge advocate for this. Again, we talked about this in the podcast last week, and I shared my feelings and my thoughts around being grateful for everything we've been through in life, because all of it serves a purpose. But here, we have the leading expert in gratitude saying that it's good to remember the bad and be grateful for what you've been through and how far you've come.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Well, I mean I think it really helps put a lot of things into perspective. Listen, life is going to be a rollercoaster of good and bad, right? You're going to have some good times, you're going to have some bad times, and I think it's very wise to be present to those bad times to relate to where you are right now.

For me, I can beat myself up maybe for eating something that I shouldn't have, and then it's good to remember when I was 260 pounds and totally unhealthy, in a "bad" time of my health journey, allows me to look at myself at 180 and be like "Alright, let's relax. Let's chill out a little bit and not beat ourselves up so much."

And so, I think it's really important to remember the bad, because—and I think one other big thing, and it's not just remembering the bad, but being grateful for the bad, is it reminds you that you survived it, you made it, it was bad. And a lot of times, when things are tough now, you think "I'm not going to make it," well, think back to another time when it was even worse, when it was even harder, and you made it through that, so you're going to make it through this. And so, I just think the remembering the bad is essential.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Absolutely. Number three – ask yourself three questions. Utilize the meditation technique known as Naikan, which involves reflecting on three questions: "What have I received from __?", "What have I given to __?", and "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?"

Interesting questions, because I think it really helps you, going back to remembering the bad, this is a different perspective and take on that, right? You know? I think sometimes, one of the things I love about this, in the question "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?" I think so often in our lives, we put responsibility on other people, either for things that have happened, or for things that need to take place in our life, and we don't take enough control and power into our own hands.

And I think sometimes, we create issues in life, and we don't own those either. And so, I love that question. To be really self-reflective from that perspective takes a lot of strength and maturity, but I think it also breeds a lot more gratitude in our lives.

Jonathan Hunsaker: It forces us to be honest, right? And we don't always want to be, because then you have to look at yourself for all of the crap that you contributed to whatever situation it was. And listen, we all contribute, right? We might want to think that it's all somebody else that caused it to us, but we play generally just as much of a part as the other party. And so, I love that part of it.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Absolutely. Number four – learn prayers of gratitude. In many spiritual traditions, prayers of gratitude are considered to be the most powerful form of prayer, because through these prayers, people recognize the ultimate source of all they are and all they will ever be.

And this could look so different for everyone, based on your spiritual beliefs, what you practice, your religious beliefs. The beautiful thing about life is that we all have our own journey, our own experience, and we all believe different things.

I think it's what makes life so beautiful, I think it's what makes people so beautiful, and prayers of gratitude are something that are practiced by many people, and they're very meaningful to them. So, if this isn't something you're practicing in your life, it's definitely something you can look into to add to your gratitude practices day-in and day-out.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Right. It's not dependent on any kind of religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs. I mean these are prayers, probably a lot of them, 1,000+ years old, and they were working then for people, they're work for us now. But do a Google search and just find some that resonate with you. It doesn't matter where it came from, it doesn't matter what book it was written in or where it came from. Find something that resonates with you, because that's all that matters. We're all on our own journeys.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Absolutely. Number five – come to your senses. Through our senses, the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear, we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive. Seen through the lens of gratitude, the human body is not only a miraculous construction, but also a gift.

This is something tied to a gratitude practice I shared in last week's podcast, which you can go and find in our podcast from last week. I'm not going to talk about it here today. But a gratitude practice that I shared, one of the ways that you start out with this gratitude practice is very focused on your body, just breathing and feeling your heart, and realizing how much blood is flowing through your body.

If you think about all the things your body does that you're not even thinking about and being grateful for just those things alone. That you're breathing, that you're moving, that your body works the way that it does, tying that into the senses overall. Senses can be such a powerful thing in feeling gratitude. What I can see today, what I can smell today.

I can hear my kids laughing. I can taste this amazing food. I can hug someone and feel connection. I think the senses are one of the most powerful ways to feel gratitude. I was in the gym this morning working out. I can lift heavy weight and my body's strong enough to continue lifting heavier and heavier weight in ways I never thought possible.

There are so many things tied to our senses and gratitude, and I think that's one of the fastest ways, if you're in a negative or a bad place, connecting to a sense in your body can bring gratitude so quickly.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Well, just getting into your body. We live in our heads so much. We're constantly thinking about things. We're overanalyzing things and making assumptions about things. And it's like we live up here so freaking much that it would just do us all a little bit of good to get out of there and get present.

TeriAnn Trevenen: And feel.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Get present to your breath, some big, deep breaths, some smells. What do you hear? Do you hear the birds outside? Are you grateful that there's birds outside? Are you grateful that you can hear? Right?

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yeah.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I mean all of these little things that we just don't even pay any attention to can have—

TeriAnn Trevenen: Take for granted.

Jonathan Hunsaker: That's exactly it. We take it for granted. And so, just getting back into your body, for me, that's what number five is, come to your senses, getting back into your body and getting out of our freaking heads.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yeah, absolutely. Number six – use visual reminders. Because the two primary obstacles to gratefulness are forgetfulness and the lack of mindful awareness, visual reminders can serve as cues to trigger thoughts of gratitude. Oftentimes, the best visual reminders are other people, but I would also add to this, like going back to what you said, it's not only just getting out of your head, but if we're going to be in our head, and we've talked about this many times in podcasts before, I am big on intentional living.

Why are you doing things? Why are you eating things? Why are you acting certain ways? Why are you behaving this way in a relationship? Like what are your intentions? I am a huge believer that when we have intentions and we say them out loud, or we have intentions and we act on them, life brings things back to us.

I am a huge believer in that. It's not tied to any religion, it's not tied to anything spiritual, it's tied to the fact that what we feel, what we think matters, and it contributes to our life. And so, I think when we talk about here, a lack of mindful awareness, we do spend a lot of time in our heads, but are we really mindful about what we're thinking and processing in our heads?

Are we really mindful about getting out of our heads and getting into our bodies? And talking about those visual reminders, not only other people, but if you struggle with a certain mentality, put a sticky note on your mirror that says—if you struggle with like "I'm not good enough," or "I'm ugly," or "I'm fat,"

or "I'm never going to measure up," or "I'm not good at my job," or whatever, put sticky notes on your mirror that either says, "I'm working to be here," or "I am these things."

Sometimes, even when we aren't those things yet, but we constantly see them and we remember to feel them, to be grateful for them, we actually can mold into the person we want to see ourselves become, because we're constantly thinking about it, we're mindful about what it is. And I would even go so far as to say add gratitude to that.

"I'm grateful that I can be that person, and I have the ability to be that person." "I'm grateful for who I am, I'm grateful for who I can become." So, I just think there's a lot of things there that we can do to be grateful and to be more mindful of being grateful, to be intentional in how we move forward.

Jonathan Hunsaker: You said so many things that I want to weigh in on, but I won't, to keep our podcast a reasonable time, but what I really loved about what you said was putting the sticky notes up there, and I think putting it in the context of gratitude. So, if you don't like your job, it may be a good idea to have a Post-It note on your mirror that says, "I'm grateful that I have a job," right?

That will remind you, like you can feel the gratitude for having that job, and that may also get you present to going and looking for another job, but at least you feel grateful for the fact that you have that job right then and there.

And he talks about the best visual reminders are other people, and I think that is true when you get better at being grateful for things on a regular basis. If you're not used to doing it, I mean I don't know that just other people always brings that up, and that's where I think the Post-It notes really matter a lot.

Listen, I have three-year-old and five-year-old girls. I love them to death. Sometimes, they love to push my buttons, and I'm not feeling how grateful I am at that moment, but it'd be nice to have some Post-It notes around the playroom that I'm grateful that I have daughters, I'm grateful for all the things that they're teaching me.

Little things like that, those visual reminders, to just read it, that can change your entire perspective, it can change your entire mindset just reading five words. And so, I love Post-It notes. I don't do them all over, but the mirror in my bathroom is covered with Post-It notes, different things like that, because it really matters to me.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Absolutely. Number seven – make a vow to practice gratitude. Research shows that making an oath to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the action will be executed.

Therefore, write your own gratitude vow, which could be as simple as "I vow to count my blessings each day." And post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day. This goes back to what we were just talking about a minute ago. Maybe post a sticky note "I'm grateful that I have a job. I vow to gain the skillset and experience to go into a job that I like better."

You know what I mean? It's not—gratitude isn't just like "I'm grateful for my pillow, and my house, and my bed, and my car." Like gratitude goes so much deeper. Gratitude can turn into intentions that can change our life. And so, I think it's really important. It goes back to what we were talking about in using visual reminders.

Number eight – watch your language. Grateful people have a particular linguistic style that uses the language of gifts, givers, blessings, bless, fortune, fortunate, and abundance, which I love the word abundance. In gratitude, you should not focus on how inherently good you are, but rather on the inherently good things that others have done on your behalf.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I love this, totally, and I think it—words matter, right? And I don't know that people always realize how much words matter. And the words that you use when you're speaking, the words that you use when you're talking about yourself, all of those things matter. Those words matter. And so, I love the idea of blessings, blessed, fortune, fortunate, abundance.

Like let's talk about these things that we really have. You know what I mean? And let's change our mindset around abundance. I think—I got into the personal development space a long, long time ago, but it was a big awakening for me that there's an abundance of everything out there for us, right? There's not a lack.

Like we have a supplement company, and I'm not out there afraid of all these other supplement companies. There's an abundance of it out there, and it's a good thing. It's a good thing to have all these other organic companies out there. You know what I mean? And so, there's all these different ways that we can really just change our language and change the words that we use and change the way that we think about things and feel about things, from that state of being fortunate, being abundant.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yep. There's strong research behind the fact that the words we think and the words that we say shape our reality. And so, just taking an example of maybe you think you're ugly, and you don't think that you're good enough. Imagine if you thought to yourself when you woke up in the morning, "I'm beautiful exactly as I am," and you said that in the morning versus looking in the mirror and being "Oh, I don't like that. I don't like that."

Imagine if, instead of saying one negative thing, you said three positive things, how that would change your mindset and the gratitude you have for yourself. Number nine – go through the motions. If you go through grateful motions, the emotion of gratitude should be triggered. Grateful motions include smiling, saying thank you, and writing letters of gratitude.

So, I have to say, one of the big practices in my life is sending texts of gratitude to people in my life. I rotate through my family; I rotate through friends. I am a big, huge believer in sending gratitude to people in my life who mean a lot to me, but also, sending gratitude for people who may be prickly in our lives that aren't our favorite people.

That doesn't mean you have to lie or tell them things you don't really feel about them, but it can be finding something that you can find value and gratitude in for that person. Anytime I'm having a bad day, my go-to is to send a message of gratitude to someone in my life who has really meant a lot to me. What happens is, they typically respond with other messages back to me, and say "Oh, well I'm grateful for this."

It starts this reaction of feeling gratitude for one another, and that connection in your mind, in your heart, in your body changes the whole course of your day. So, I couldn't—I could not love this one enough. Smiling, looking at people and smiling, sending messages. Human connection and the way we interact with other people can bring so much gratitude into our lives.

Jonathan Hunsaker: You know? Not only does it enforce the healthy relationships, but it helps repair the bad ones, too. You talk about prickly. There's some prickly people in our lives that you would send a text message to. I remember my mom telling me about an exercise she learned after she divorced my dad and she was trying to work through a lot of that, and she learned about a thank you letter.

And she wrote him a letter that thanked him for everything that she learned, for everything that came from that. And that stuck with me my entire life, thinking about writing a thank you letter. If you ever go through a breakup or anything where you feel like somebody's done you wrong, write a thank you letter and get really present to all the things that you got from that relationship, all the things that you got from that person, all the things that they taught you.

And now, all of a sudden, they're not this piece of crap, whatever, did this, did that. You actually can re-feel the love that you had for that person. And even if they don't receive it, even if you don't send it to them, just simply writing that letter and getting to that place personally will have you work through all that stuff.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yeah. I love that you shared that, and I'm going to get a bit personal, which I don't always go this personal on the podcast, but I love that you shared that about your mom, because I went through a divorce a few years ago, and it was not the best thing right at the beginning. We didn't have a good relationship, and we really weren't speaking or on speaking terms.

And gratitude is actually what saved my relationship with my ex-husband, and it started with instead of focusing on all the negative things and all the things I thought should be changed about him, and all the things I thought he should do, I started sending things like "Thank you for our daughters that we share. Thank you for being here for their birthday."

And when that started happening, it changed the way I felt about him, and it changed the way I saw him as the father of my children, and it changed the way that I behaved with him. It made me a kinder person in communication, in the way I interacted, and in the way I structured things in our lives for our girls and for moving forward.

And now, I get those back, and it's taken time, and it's taken effort, and it's been practicing gratitude consistently to get to that point, but now, we spend birthdays with our kids together, we do things with our kids together, we talk on the phone at the same time, and we all share family conversations. And I absolutely believe that that came, that healing and that relationship and moving forward came from practicing gratitude, practicing gratitude to heal things in our lives that we think may not be able to be healed.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Well, I mean how do you expect somebody else to respond, right? I mean you're writing things that you're grateful for, you're sharing things that you love about them or that you share, any of that. It's going to take down the walls. It's going to help with that. And it's often, we say it takes two to tango, but it really can take just one to repair a relationship.

And it's not easy. You've got to be the bigger person. You have to find the gratitude in it. Through all the pain, through all the hurt, through all the other stuff, all these things that are piling on, if you can find that. And then, even if you can go a step further, like you did, and express that, it's amazing what it does for relationships, and really, it's for the sake of your daughters, right? It's that much better for them because you went through that entire exercise.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, the other thing too, is like I actually feel like I can have a friendship with my ex-husband now, and that he can add value to my life, and I see it from that perspective. I don't even see it now just for my daughters. I feel like there's value there in having a friendship with someone who I thought I would never have a friendship with again.

And so, I think you can also get to that point, where it's not just for other people or for this reason, but you can find that in your heart that there's value in all people being in your life.

Number ten – think outside the box. If you want to make the most out of opportunities to flex your gratitude muscles, you must creatively look for new situations and circumstances in which to feel grateful.

Jonathan Hunsaker: I think it's great, because as you practice gratitude more, you're going to fall into rhythms of the same old thing. "I'm grateful for my daughters. I'm grateful for this..." Right? And before you know it, like it doesn't have that emotional impact. And I'm not saying that we all go down that dreary of a gratefulness path but think outside the box.

What are some different things to really be grateful for? What are some things in the past that you can go back and really find that lesson in? How many times do we hold on to anger, do we hold on to resentment, do we hold on to judgements of things that happened 10, 20, 30 years ago? And maybe we don't even hold on to it consciously, we've just pushed it out of our brain.

Well, if you really want to process it, you really want to heal from it, why don't you go back, and let's get creative and think of ways to be grateful for that situation? Because now you're not just blocking it out, now you're not just setting it aside, now you're not just sitting with a little ball of anger in your gut. You're actually processing it and getting rid of it by finding—and your body being able to let go of that stuff.

For me, that's where 260 pounds comes from, is from holding on to all of these things. And when I started running, and I started running in silence and processing all of these things, and finding things I'm grateful for, and working through all of this crap, whether real or not, just crap that I had internalized, it's when things really changed for me healthwise, right? And so, I think that there's all kinds of ways to get creative and look outside the box.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Just doing this podcast today, when we were talking about how important words are and how important showing gratitude is, and that connection, I was just thinking to myself, "Wouldn't it be so cool to have a board in my house where I put a name for each of my girls on the board, and then like write that week what I'm grateful for, the things I'm proud of them for?"

Both—goes both ways, because we talk about sometimes, we think gratitude, but we don't say it out loud, then also saying things and then reading them at the same time, how it restructures how we think in our mind. And how powerful that would be for the people in our house to walk by a board on a bad

day and read like a new word that day, like "I'm grateful for this about you," and they have changed the word in the day, and it was like "Oh, they noticed that about me."

And I was just like thinking of creative ways to have more gratitude in my house, and it's funny that thinking outside the box is the last one, but finding ways that are meaningful for you, your family, your friends, yourself, to have gratitude, and making it fun and making it meaningful. I think there's so many things.

Speaking of that, we have incredible information in our show notes about exercising your gratitude muscle. We don't have time to cover it on the podcast, but according to UCLA's Mindfulness Awareness Research Center, having an attitude of gratitude changes the structure of your brain, it helps us to be healthier and happier, and there are ways that we can improve practicing gratitude in our lives.

So, they've put together information, questions and things to inspire you to practice your gratitude and to exercise your gratitude muscle. So, we will put all of that information in our show notes. Go to our website, EmpoweringYouOrganically.com, to find that and work through that if you're struggling to find creative ways to practice gratitude in your life, or if you just want to start practicing gratitude in your life more overall.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Yes, your homework is not done just because this podcast is coming to an end. Go to EmpoweringYouOrganically.com. You've really got to check out these exercises. We're not including it here because it gets really deep, and we'd be on this podcast for another hour, but we've put together these exercises that will really take you to the next level in learning how to practice gratitude and learning all of that.

Not to mention, you get the regular show notes, transcripts, all of that, but please go to EmpoweringYouOrganically.com and continue your learning, continue getting better and mastering the art of gratitude, because it will absolutely change your life.

I don't have much more to say other than I'm really grateful for being able to do this podcast. I'm grateful for the people that tune in and listen. I'm grateful that you care about what I have to say, maybe not all the time, but at least some of the time. And I'm grateful for you, TeriAnn. I'm grateful to have a friendship and somebody that I can trust the way that I trust you. And you show up for the podcast, you show up for business, and you're just somebody I'm extremely grateful for.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm grateful for you as well. I'm really grateful for this journey that we have been able to be on. At this time of year, where we practice gratitude. I don't just think about gratitude, I feel it deeply. The journey of my life has been an interesting one, especially

these last few years, and I have grown tremendously in this last year, doing the podcast, working on Organixx, serving our customers, empowering people with their health, working with people like Jonathan and our team, building incredible businesses and relationships.

And I, as we've talked about gratitude, this week and last week, it really makes me reflect on the fact that gratitude is one of the things that has carried me through everything in my life and allowed me to see the good and the bad, all as a part of my journey and things that work together for me to be exactly where I am now.

And the thing I'm most grateful for is being exactly where I am right now in my life, in this moment. There are things I could change, there are things I could wish away, I could wish for, but I truly believe and I am grateful for the fact that I am exactly where I am supposed to be, and that's sharing all of this information with you today, which I am incredibly grateful for. So, thank you to our listeners.

Jonathan Hunsaker: We can't leave out Joni. Joni's the producer of our podcast. I can actually see her right now on my screen because we're doing a Zoom interview here. Joni puts together all of our show notes, Joni puts together the entire website, she puts together the videos, she makes sure all of this happens. She makes us sound smart by giving us all of these wonderful notes and things like that. And so, Joni, so grateful for you. Thank you for making this happen.

TeriAnn Trevenen: I second that wholeheartedly.

Jonathan Hunsaker: Okay, I would be extremely grateful if you went to iTunes and you subscribed to our podcast and you gave us a thumbs up and a comment and give us a four or five-star rating. I don't know if they do four or five, but whatever the highest one is, I'd be grateful if you gave us that. And go to EmpoweringYouOrganically.com to continue your journey in learning how to be more grateful in your life.

We have so much amazing information there. It will change your life. If you do anything, do this. Don't change your diet, don't go start working out, don't go start taking supplements, don't go do any of these other things that you might be inspired to do, do this, and do it this holiday season, or start January 1, or whatever motivation you need. Start practicing gratitude and it will change your entire life. Thanks for tuning in. Thanks, TeriAnn.

TeriAnn Trevenen: Thanks, everyone.

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