



# The Science and Spirit of Gratefulness: 25 Years of Progress

Dr. Robert Emmons  
UC Davis



Gratitude is the deepest  
touchpoint of human existence.

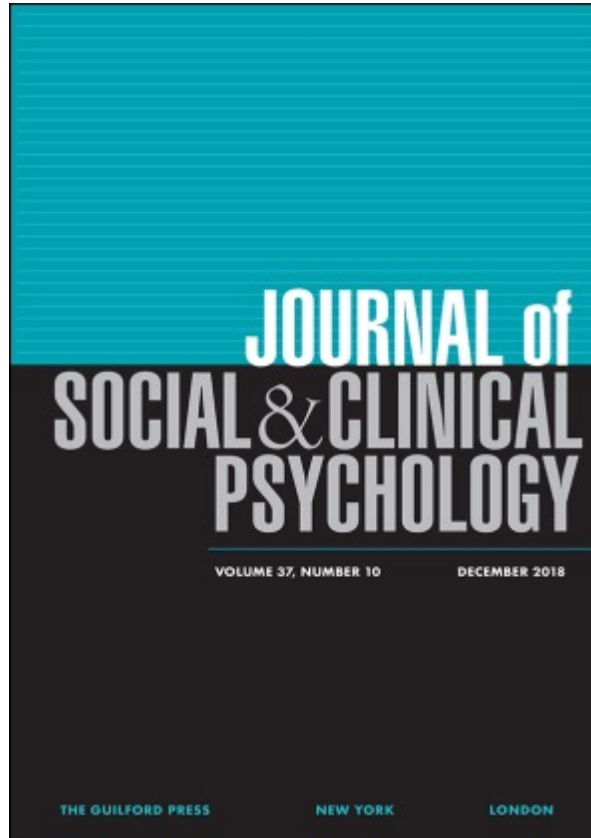


# GRATITUDE

## Lecture Schedule:

- Today: The Science of Gratitude
- Tomorrow: The Spirit of Gratitude
- Friday: New Directions

# The origins of my journey...



CONTENTS		VOLUME 19 NUMBER 1 SPRING 2000 ISSN 0736-7236
CLASSICAL SOURCES OF HUMAN STRENGTH: A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS		
CLASSICAL SOURCES OF HUMAN STRENGTH: REVISITING AN OLD HOME AND BUILDING A NEW ONE Michael E. McCullough and C. R. Snyder		1
THE PAST AND POSSIBLE FUTURES OF HOPE C. R. Snyder		11
SELF-CONTROL, MORALITY, AND HUMAN STRENGTH Roy F. Baumeister and Julie Juola Exline		29
FORGIVENESS AS HUMAN STRENGTH: THEORY, MEASUREMENT, AND LINKS TO WELL-BEING Michael E. McCullough		43
GRATITUDE AS A HUMAN STRENGTH: APPRAISING THE EVIDENCE Robert A. Emmons and Cheryl A. Crumpler		56
HUMILITY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES, EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH June Price Tangney		70
WISDOM AS A CLASSICAL SOURCE OF HUMAN STRENGTH: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND EMPIRICAL INQUIRY Deirdre A. Kramer		83
SPIRITUALITY AND HEALTH: WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW Linda K. George, David B. Larson, Harold G. Koenig, and Michael E. McCullough		102
A PROLEGOMENON TO AN EPIDEMIOLOGY OF LOVE: THEORY, MEASUREMENT, AND HEALTH OUTCOMES Jeff Levin		117
VICES, VIRTUES AND SOURCES OF HUMAN STRENGTH IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE Solomon Schimmel		137
A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY FIELD OF DREAMS: "IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME..." C. R. Snyder and Michael E. McCullough		151

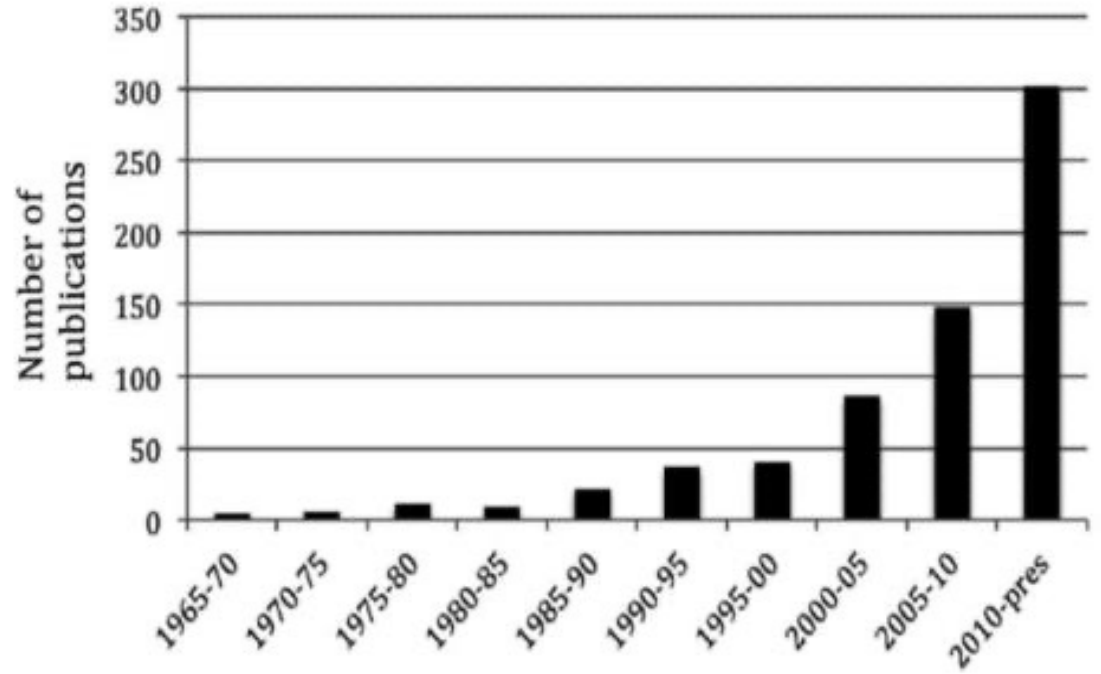
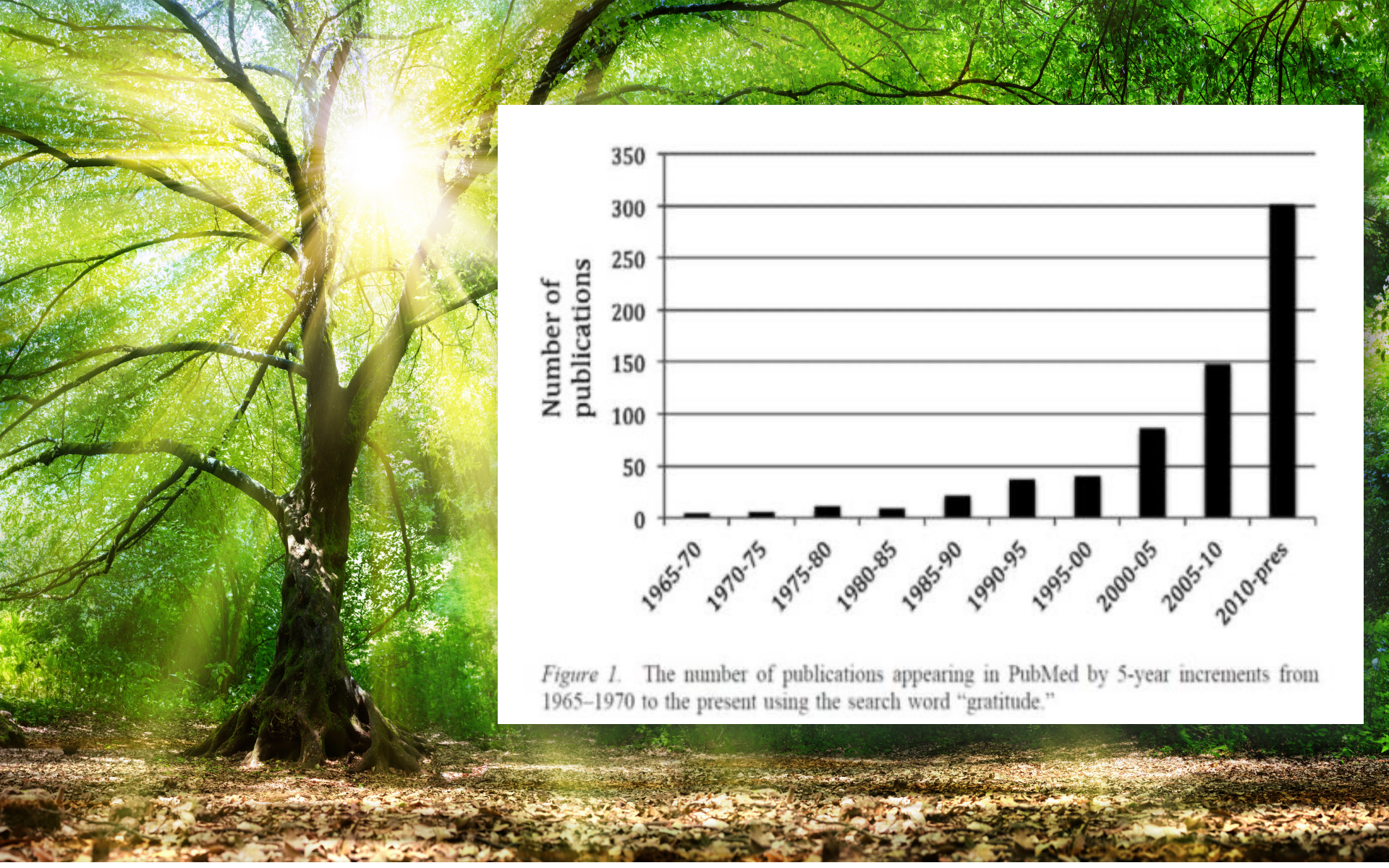


# What is Gratitude?

**Gratitude** is an *affirmation* of the good and *recognition* that this good originates outside the self.







*Figure 1.* The number of publications appearing in PubMed by 5-year increments from 1965-1970 to the present using the search word "gratitude."



A close-up photograph of a weathered wooden door. The door is made of vertical wooden planks. On the left side, there is a large, ornate metal padlock with a complex, decorative shape. The padlock is made of dark, possibly rusted, metal. It has a large, curved handle on the right side. To the left of the padlock, there is a brass keyhole set into a metal plate. The text "Is expressing gratitude the key to unlocking happiness?" is overlaid on the bottom right of the image in a white, serif font with a slight shadow.

Is expressing gratitude the  
key to unlocking happiness?



# Counting Blessings or Burdens?

- Random assignment, placebo controlled experimental trials (RCT)
- $N > 8,000$ , 8-80+





“There are many things in our lives that we might feel grateful about. Think back over the past day and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.”

DAY 1

DAILY INTENTION  
Today I choose to feel gratitude.

today I'm *grateful* for...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List at least one thing You are *grateful* for in each of the following areas

I'M THANKFUL FOR TODAY... <small>(big, small, mundane or super special)</small>	A GOAL FOR TOMORROW IS... <small>(big, small, mundane or super special)</small>
Physical Health/Body	Physical Health/Body
Friends/Family/Connections	Friends/Family/Connections
Career/Work	Career/Work
Emotional/Spiritual	Emotional/Spiritual

*high-highs & low-lows*

The high point of today was \_\_\_\_\_

The low point of today was \_\_\_\_\_

# The Grateful Disposition: A Conceptual and Empirical Topography

Michael E. McCullough  
Southern Methodist University

Robert A. Emmons  
University of California, Davis

Jo-Ann Tsang  
Southern Methodist University

- Frequency: how often
- Intensity: how much
- Span: how broad
- Density: how deep

## The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4=Neutral  
5=Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree

1. I have so much in life to be thankful for
2. If I had to list everything I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list
3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for
4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people
5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been a part of my life history
6. Long amounts of time can go before I feel grateful to someone or something

Add up your scores for items 1, 2, 4, and 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Reverse your scores for items 3 and 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Your GQ-6 Score: \_\_\_\_\_



Gratefulness  
Increases  
Emotional  
Well-Being



**Journal of Research in Personality, 2007**

*The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression – Wood, Maltby, Gillett et al*

Grateful  
People  
Achieve  
More



**Journal of Personality & Social Psych, 2003**

*Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life – Emmons, McCullough*

Grateful  
People Get  
Along Better  
with Others



**Clinical Psychology Review, 2009**

*Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration - Wood, Froh, Geraghty*

Grateful  
People Pay  
It Forward



**Psychological Science, 2006**

*Gratitude and Prosocial Behavior: Helping When It Costs You – Bartlett, DeSteno*

Grateful  
People Are  
Less  
Depressed



**American Psychologist, 2005**

Grateful  
People Are  
More  
Resilient to  
Trauma



**Behaviour Research and Therapy, 2006**

*Gratitude and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in*

# Gratitude and health behaviors

- ✓ 15-18% better sleep
- ✓ 2X more steps walked per day in coronary patients (hi vs. low gratitude)
- 30% less saturated fat in diets (hi vs. low gratitude)
- 50% greater medical adherence (medication, diet)





# Gratitude is Good Medicine

A person stands on a wooden pier, looking out at a calm lake under a sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm glow and reflecting on the water. The person's shadow is cast on the pier.

- ✓ 23% lower levels of cortisol
- ✓ Reduced feelings of **hopelessness** in 88% of suicidal inpatients
- ✓ 15% Improvement in inflammatory biomarkers in HF patients
- ✓ 30% reduced fear or recurrence and increased QOL in cancer patients
- ✓ Lower levels of drug use and recovery from addiction

- ✓ 20-25% ↓ suicidal risk
- ✓ 15% lower **depression** in arthritis and IBD patients
- ✓ 25-33% ↑ in exercise
- ✓ 38% reduced rate of smoking
- ✓ Decelerate the effects of neurodegeneration (9% increase in verbal fluency)
- ✓ Healthier lipid profiles
- ✓ ↓ C-reactive protein



# Gratitude Works!

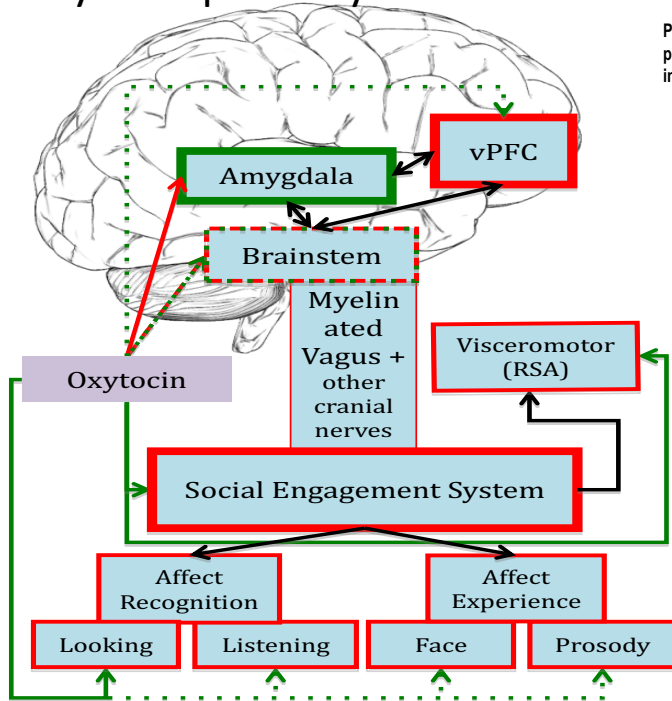
Gratitude has the power to heal, energize, and change lives.



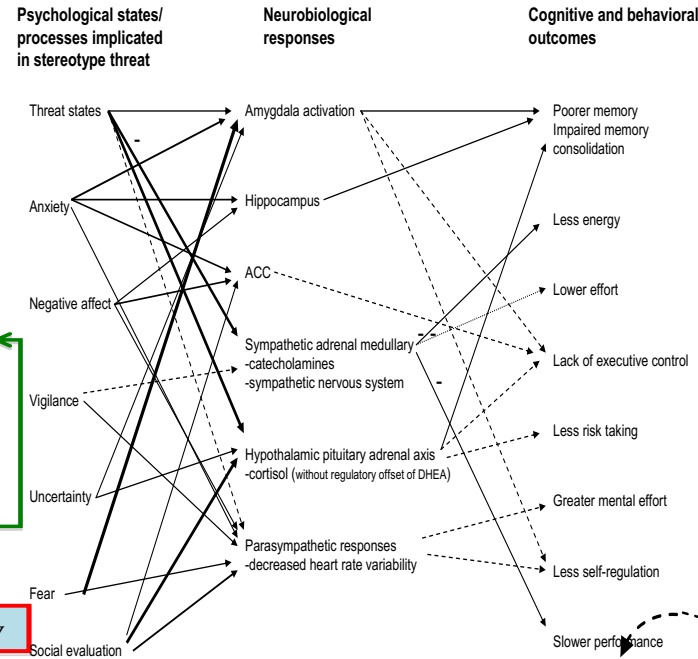


# Possible pathways linking gratitude to health

## Oxytocin pathway



## Potentiated behavior pathway



## Vagal pathway

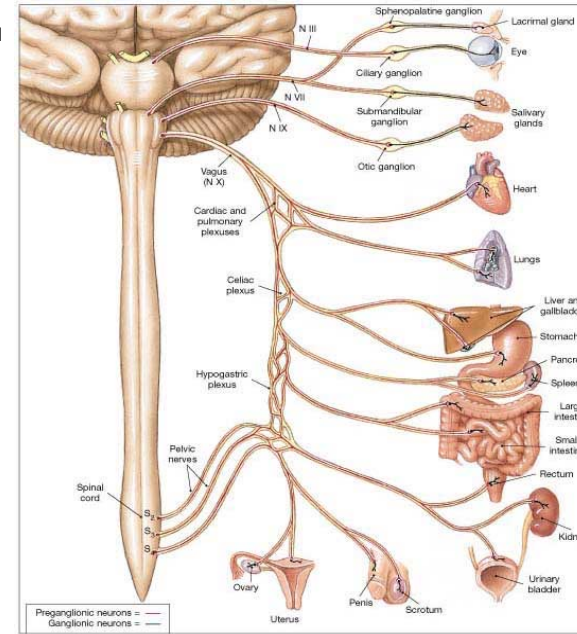
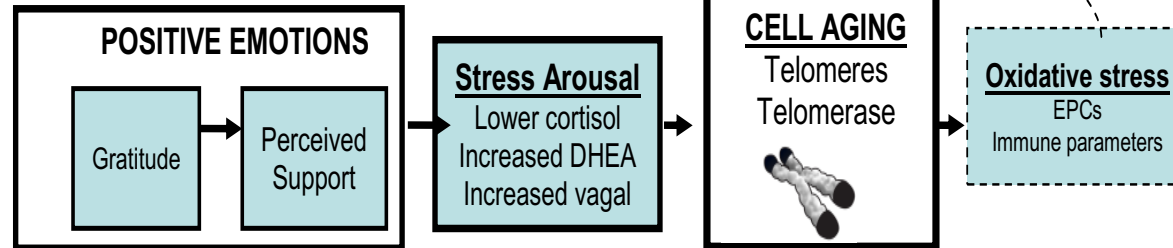


FIGURE 16-9 Distribution of Parasympathetic Innervation

## Stress pathway







# Why does gratitude work?

## The ARC of gratitude

1. Gratitude amplifies
2. Gratitude rescues
3. Gratitude connects



# Gratitude is Social. It Pays Itself Forward.

YOU GIVE THANKS.  
AND FEEL GRATITUDE.



THEY RECEIVE IT.  
AND GIVE IT, TOO.



IT SPREADS.  
AND SO DOES GRATITUDE.



# GRATITUDE

- I am reminded of the things that make me feel good. It makes me want to do more positive things.
- I go from what is missing to what I do have.
- See the good in the people in my life rather than just their faults.
- Makes me feel safer. It helps me relax because I remember that I am supported.
- When I'm scared, it helps me remember that there is help.
- Helps me love my life a bit more.
- Makes me feel lucky rather than sorry for myself.
- It brings me back in the here and now, where I can always find something to be grateful for.
- It brings a smile across my face. Helps make the negativity vanish even for a brief moment.



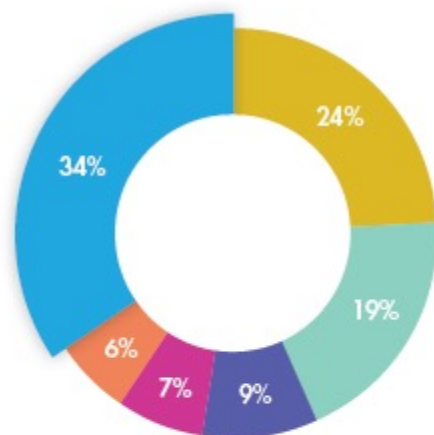
# GRATITUDE

## Gratitude Myths

- Gratitude undercuts ambition
- You have to feel gratitude in order to act gratefully
- Gratitude is naïve given life's harsh realities



# New Research from NRC Health and Accordant Philanthropy: Gratitude and Charitable Giving to Health Care



What would most likely MOTIVATE you to make a CHARITABLE GIFT to a hospital?

- Desire to express gratitude for care
- Quality of health care services
- Successful treatment outcomes
- Brand or reputation of the hospital
- Being asked to give
- Other





Gratitude is not just a switch to turn on when things go well, it is also a light that shines in the darkness.

# GRATITUDE

## Bad to Good

Think of your worst moments, your sorrows, your losses, and your sadness and then remember. Focus on how you got through the worst day of your life, the trauma, the trial; you endured the temptation; you survived the bad relationship; you're making your way out of the dark. Remember the bad things, and then look to see where you are now.



Choose to  
see the world  
through  
grateful eyes.



It will never look  
the same way again.

~Doe Zantamata

“I believe that life is not always fair. It has certainly been true in my case. It is not fair that I should have wonderful, caring, supportive parents who raised me right, and brothers and sisters that are there when I need them. It’s not fair that I should be blessed with a beautiful, talented wife and together we should have two



equally beautiful, talented daughters who make us proud daily. No, life is not fair. Why should I have had so many years of good health and energy and good friends to camp and backpack with through the years...ALS is a terrible disease, but it does not negate the rest of my life.”

*-Steve Fiske*

[illegible]