

Positive Communication Activity
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Title:
The One-Minute Gratitude Experiment

Learning Outcomes:

Through this activity, participants will learn to (a) experience the positive effects of disclosing gratitude, (b) practice positive communication in action, and (c) reflect on their gratitude experience.

Background & Brief Description

“To thank is to give; to be gracious means to share. This pleasure that I owe to you is not for me alone. This joy, this happiness, they belong to both of us.” (Comte-Sponville, 2011, p. 133).

One of the most meaningful acts of positive communication is the act of disclosure. According to Mirivel (2014), disclosure serves many functions but a central one is the deepening of relationships. Disclosure and intimacy are closely linked together. *The one-minute gratitude experiment* is designed to illustrate an act of disclosure that is simple, concrete, and impactful. It was created to move students from talking about positive communication to *doing* it. Researchers have shown that expressing gratitude produces clear benefits, including raising people’s sense of well-being and lowering depression in the long term. As Seligman (2011) wrote, expressing “gratitude can make your life happier and more satisfying” and can “strengthen our relationship with others” (p. 30).

This exercise is designed to support reading from *The Art of Positive Communication: Theory and Practice* or academic articles focusing on disclosure and gratitude. The exercise can be recommended in an online environment or directly during class.

In an Online Environment

For an online environment such as Blackboard, simply create a discussion or journal prompt with the following directions:

For depth of connection, our disclosure needs to be authentic, truthful and honest. It needs to reflect a human experience common to all and feel personal. This is what makes expressing gratitude such a perfect example of authentic disclosure.

Take a moment to reflect on someone for whom you are grateful in your life. It can be your parent, your spouse, a friend, or someone you work with. The only criterion you need for this exercise is that you can reach them by sending a text.

Think about why you are grateful for them and write down on a piece of paper how you feel about them. Once you have written down your thoughts, simply prepare a nice text to express your gratitude for them. An easy way to begin is to state, “I’m thinking of you today and I wanted you to know how grateful I am for you.” Then, express what you wrote down with the intention of sharing how you feel about them. Then, once your message is typed, press send and see how the other person responds.

After going through the exercise, reflect on your experience: What moments of resistance did you experience if any? Did you hesitate before pressing send? How did the other person respond to your disclosure? And overall, how do you feel after doing the exercise?

In-Class Activity

As an in-class activity, prepare students for the exercise.

1. Assign readings on disclosure of gratitude in relationships.
2. Offer a mini-lecture on the significance of disclosure in personal and professional relationships. Situate the act of expressing gratitude as an example of positive disclosure in the context of personal relationships. If not well, expressing gratitude is disclosure that is authentic, personal, real, and impactful.
3. Challenge students that expressing gratitude can be done right here, right now. Share with students that although many of us *feel* gratitude for others, it is the act of *expressing gratitude* that ultimately makes a difference in the context of relating with others.
4. Ask students to reflect on a person for whom they feel grateful.
5. Ask each student to write down notes about why they feel grateful for them and to identify specific instances for which they are grateful.
6. Ask students to take out their phone and to write a simple text to the individual. Provide a frame of reference by asking students to complete this sentence: “I’m thinking of you today and I wanted you to know how grateful I am for you....”
7. Give students 3-4 minutes to complete the task.
8. Reflect with the class by leading discussion with these questions:
 - a. What was your experience like doing this activity?
 - b. What response did you get from the text?
 - c. When did you feel resistance toward the activity? Why?
 - d. To what extent does gratitude play a role in personal and professional relationships?

Expressing gratitude is an act of positive communication. Self-disclosure can enable each of us to manage difficult emotions, but it can also enable us to bring us closer to the people we care about. When you disclose, you can deepen your relationships.

References:

Mirivel, J. C. (2014). *The art of positive communication: Theory and Practice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.