

# COACHING NOTES FROM COACHING CULTURE

## EPISODE 132 THE POWER OF EXPRESSING GRATITUDE



Multiple studies indicate that satisfaction in life is significantly improved by a consistent practice of gratitude and expressing appreciation for others.

Studies also indicate writing letters of appreciation to those who made a positive impact on your life can have a lasting effect on your long-term happiness - some studies indicate the impact is more significant for the author of the letter than the receiver!

### Developing a Personal Gratitude Practice

Begin practicing gratitude by starting a consistent habit of writing down things you are thankful for. This could be as simple as listing three things to start every day.

*“Energy flows where attention goes.”* When we give our attention to looking for the positives in life we are more likely to find them. This is especially important because our brains are naturally hard-wired to search for scarcity (what we don’t have) and loss (what we once had).

James Clear suggests stacking a gratitude practice can be especially effective for those looking for a place to start. Consider a habit you have already established, and simply add a moment of gratitude to what you are already doing. For example...

- Being thankful for the opportunity to coach your team During the National Anthem
- In the car ride to school with your kids
- While you perform daily hygiene habits (brushing your teeth, taking a shower)

Gregg Popovich frequently tells his players how thankful he is for the opportunity to be their coach. Expressing this to their parents can be very powerful as well, “Thank you for allowing me to coach your son.”

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### A Staff Activity

During a preseason staff meeting we wrote individual notes of appreciation for each other - then shuffled those notecards together and passed the deck around the room. Each coach drew a random card and read it to the person it was written to. After all the cards were read each coach received the card written to them to keep as a reminder of how much we appreciated them.

After reading the individual notes we each wrote one additional card that began with *I love being part of this program because...* and read those to each other.

### Helping Your Players with Expressions of Gratitude

**Eye Spy** - Players are assigned a teammate to “spy on” during the week of summer camp. At the end of the week they wrote a letter to that person appreciating what makes them a good teammate and the value they bring to the team. The coaches collected those letters and delivered them whenever the time seemed right. In one particular season, we delivered those letters during a particularly difficult time of the season and it had a dramatic effect on our team.

**Mother-Son Banquet** - Coach Tim Trendel has an amazing tradition where his team hosts a dinner to honor the mothers in the program around Valentine’s Day. Each player writes a poem about their mom that they read in front of everyone after the meal. The poem must end with, “I love you, Mom.”

**Role Play Saying Thank You** - When JP brought his team to the States from Ireland he had each individual player practice how to say thank you. This included an introduction, good eye contact, a firm handshake, and a sincere “thank you.”

**Thank You Cards** - At the conclusion of the season send thank you cards to anyone who had contact with your program during the year: media members, parents, administration, custodians, etc. We asked players to write a 1-2 sentence thank you in about 25% of the cards that they signed. That way there were some personalized messages in each card that we sent.

**Teacher Appreciation Night** - We chose a home game during the season as “Teacher Appreciation Night”. We took 45 minutes to have players write notes of appreciation to the teachers that impacted them, and invited those teachers to attend the game. At the game, our announcer read a short script to recognize the teachers in attendance. We asked our parents to give them a standing ovation.

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We also provided sentence stems for players to use in writing their notes...

- I appreciate you because...
- I am thankful for you because...
- I will always remember you because...

We also encouraged them to be specific by asking them to consider...

- What effect did they have on you?
- What did you learn from them that has stayed with you?
- What made them unique?
- What did you admire most about them?
- What did you enjoy about their class?

We gave them closing stems as well...

- I hope you will join us...
- It would be great to see you...

**Thank the Officials** - Take a moment to thank the referees, scorebook keeper, etc. Some coaches even reach out to their opponents following their games to compliment their teams, and thank them for the competition.

### Where to Begin

**Thankful Thursdays** - Have players share the positive things in their life with a couple other players to start a practice once a week.

**Individual Meetings** - Start individual meetings by asking players, "What have you enjoyed about the season?"

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