



6. Get Thankful

Telling someone who's having a tough time to just cheer up and adopt an 'attitude of gratitude' may be well meant, but it's not very helpful. It invalidates or dismisses their feelings of struggle which, after all, are happening with reason.

It's a bit like that joke that 'no one in the history of calming down has anyone ever calmed down by being told to calm down'. The downregulation of emotions in any given moment is an internal matter and responsibility, and no one else's.

So, if you happen to be having a bad day today, can activating your gratitude help? Absolutely it can... although it might be better and easier after you've checked in with what's bringing you down and getting it off your chest first.

Usually, emotions just 'happen'; we don't need to make them happen because they're lightning-fast physiological responses. This is why 'activating gratitude' can sometimes feel a little forced; that's quite natural, and it can take a little while to crank up that feeling.

But when you get into the regular practice of tuning into the countless things there are to be thankful for, it's not just a lovely, simple practice; it's one of the most powerful, positive-spiral-creating mental practices ever. All you have to do is look around you and give thanks for everything you have - and that really does mean everything. Your bed. Your strengths. Your friends. Your first cup of the day. Bark on winter trees. Autumn leaves. A stranger who nods as you pass each other. Your existence. There's just no end to the things you have.

It's all-too easy to be dissatisfied with what is and to run that thought loop of 'when such-and-such happens, then things will be better'. But being thankful for what is, right now, feeds on itself in the exact polar-opposite way to that. ...

It's certainly easier to notice all life's riches when you're in a good mood, and when times are hard, of course it can be harder to do that. So, if you find yourself unable to feel thankful, it might help to engage with whatever emotions are calling for some attention.

Working through them could free up some bandwidth for practising gratitude. But whether or not that's necessary, it's excellent to practise it as often as possible. You just can't do it too much.

Being actively thankful – or in old money, counting your blessings - really does lift your spirits; especially when you do it on your own terms, and not because anyone else says you should. The more you do it, the better you get at it, and the better it is for your emotional health.

So why not have a go right now, and whenever you remember to do it again... and again...