

[Gratitude: The Conscious Practice that will literally change your life](#)

Welcome to Conscious Practice #1: Gratitude. Conscious Practices are things you can do, to help you become a more conscious person and ultimately, become your best self. Gratitude, if practiced reliably, can help you rid yourself of psyche challenges like impostor syndrome and survivor's guilt. The practice of gratitude also has the power to transform your outlook on the world and change your life.

The value.

As I mentioned in my last article, [discomfort is a pre-requisite for growth](#). Growth presents innumerable challenges, most of which are impossible to predict. Things like getting a new job, moving to a new city, or doing something you've never done before. Three years ago, I made a commitment to myself to never stop learning and growing. Since then, I've had some amazing opportunities to continue growing. The results of this growth have also introduced some new psychological challenges for me, including but not limited to, [impostor syndrome](#) and [survivor's guilt](#). Fortunately, 4 months ago I was introduced to an age-old practice that seems to be the antidote for both, as well as many other psychological growth blockers. Gratitude is that antidote. Since I started taking my gratitude practice seriously, I've experienced a transformation in my thinking and my approach to the world. I am no longer as plagued by concerns of whether I will be exposed by those I work with, or whether I'm worthy of all the fortunate things that have happened to me. I hope that by sharing this very simple conscious practice, more people will be able to free themselves to continue to actualize their potential.

The beginning.

Gratitude was introduced to me as a recommendation from my therapist. I was expressing my struggle to understand what I did to deserve an offer to work in Leadership Development for Amazon, to which he asked, "You know what to do with that, right?" I replied to this question with one of the longest blank stares I'm sure I've ever given someone. Probably something like...

After a few moments of only giving a blank stare, I finally said, "No. No I don't." He then said very plainly and with such sage wisdom, "Practice gratitude." His suggestion was so obvious, I struggled to understand how I had not come to it myself. It was as if I already knew what was behind door #3 but was scared to reveal my answer.

That moment led to one of the most profound changes in my life.

The practice.

Practicing gratitude means to deliberately look for, document, and share the things you are grateful for on a regular basis. While simple, it requires discipline for it to be effective. Most of the research suggests that writing the things you are grateful for in a journal works well. In my experience, this is true, if done daily or regularly throughout your week. You can also go on mindful walks and look for things to be grateful for. You can set reminders for yourself throughout the day to look for something to be grateful for. Lastly, if you're grateful for people in your life or the things people do for you, you can share your gratitude with them. [This is not an exhaustive list](#) of gratitude practices, but it is a beginning.

My gratitude practice started with just writing 1 to 3 things I'm grateful for in my journal every morning. Typically, I will write something like, "I'm really grateful for my wife..." This practice led me to extend my practice of gratitude to some of the things I mentioned before. Essentially, as I practiced more reliably, my practice grew, and as my practice grew, so did the benefits.

The science.

Practicing gratitude is not new. Like mindfulness, the practice of gratitude has gained in popularity in Western societies because of the empirical research that now supports it. Like mindfulness, Eastern societies have been practicing gratitude in prayer and meditation for centuries. Nevertheless, researchers like [Shawn Achor](#) and [Brene Brown](#) have shown the benefits of practicing gratitude. Thanks to this research, we now understand how well practicing gratitude works towards treating emotional health issues like anxiety and depression, as well as impostor syndrome and survivor's guilt. Additionally, the research has increased our understanding of the ancient practices and shed light on which specific gratitude practices are most effective and how, when coupled, can improve the benefits exponentially. For example, the practice of journaling/writing, noting, and sharing, when combined, are much more effective when practiced together, than when practiced alone.

The reason gratitude works has a lot to do with our evolution as human beings. We are wired to spot and pay attention to all of the negative and potentially dangerous things in life. This is often referred to as a [negativity bias](#). This bias exists

because of our ancestors. Those who were especially aware of the dangers of their environment were able to avoid them more effectively, live longer, and pass on that ability to their children. Essentially, our history suggests that we are the children of extremely anxious people. Today, this negative bias is important, but not as important as it used to be. We no longer need to worry about a saber tooth tiger attacking us, as we hunt and gather our food.

"We are the children of extremely anxious people."

Gratitude helps us rewire our brains from a negative bias, to a positive bias. Instead of being focused on the negative, it encourages us to look for all the positive things in life. The more you do this, the more powerful the bias becomes, and the more positive your life experiences are. This is also why practicing gratitude in multiple ways is more effective than only one.

For me, when I find myself wondering why I am so fortunate, and questioning whether I deserve my fortunes, I intentionally work to spend more time thinking about the things I am grateful for.

The results.

Today, after practicing gratitude reliably for about 5 months, I feel like a completely different person. No longer am I as overwhelmed with anxieties about whether my boss and coworkers will realize I do not have the skills they think I have. No longer am I as preoccupied with guilt for living in a beautiful and safe neighborhood in Seattle. Instead, I am more grateful to be where I am, who I am surrounded by, and the environment I am in.

I've also noticed this practice has had a positive impact on the people I have shared my gratitude with. It's not rocket science that people enjoy being told all the things you appreciate about them. This sharing has led to mutual expressions of gratitude and ultimately, stronger relationships.

Altogether, this reinforced positive bias has freed me to not just enjoy where I am, what I'm doing, and who I'm surrounded by, but has also helped me focus on the other things that matter: performing well at Amazon, building Conscious Helpers, loving my wife, and loving myself.

Your turn.

I hope that by sharing a bit more about my experience with this conscious practice, you will get curious and try it for yourself. The simplicity of the practice might make you doubt the impact it can have on you. However, if you trust the practice and the process, gratitude can quite literally change your life.

Go ahead, what are you grateful for?

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Other topics I've written about: [Amazon's bias for action](#) | [Amazon's peculiar organizational culture](#) | [What Conscious Helpers is all about](#)