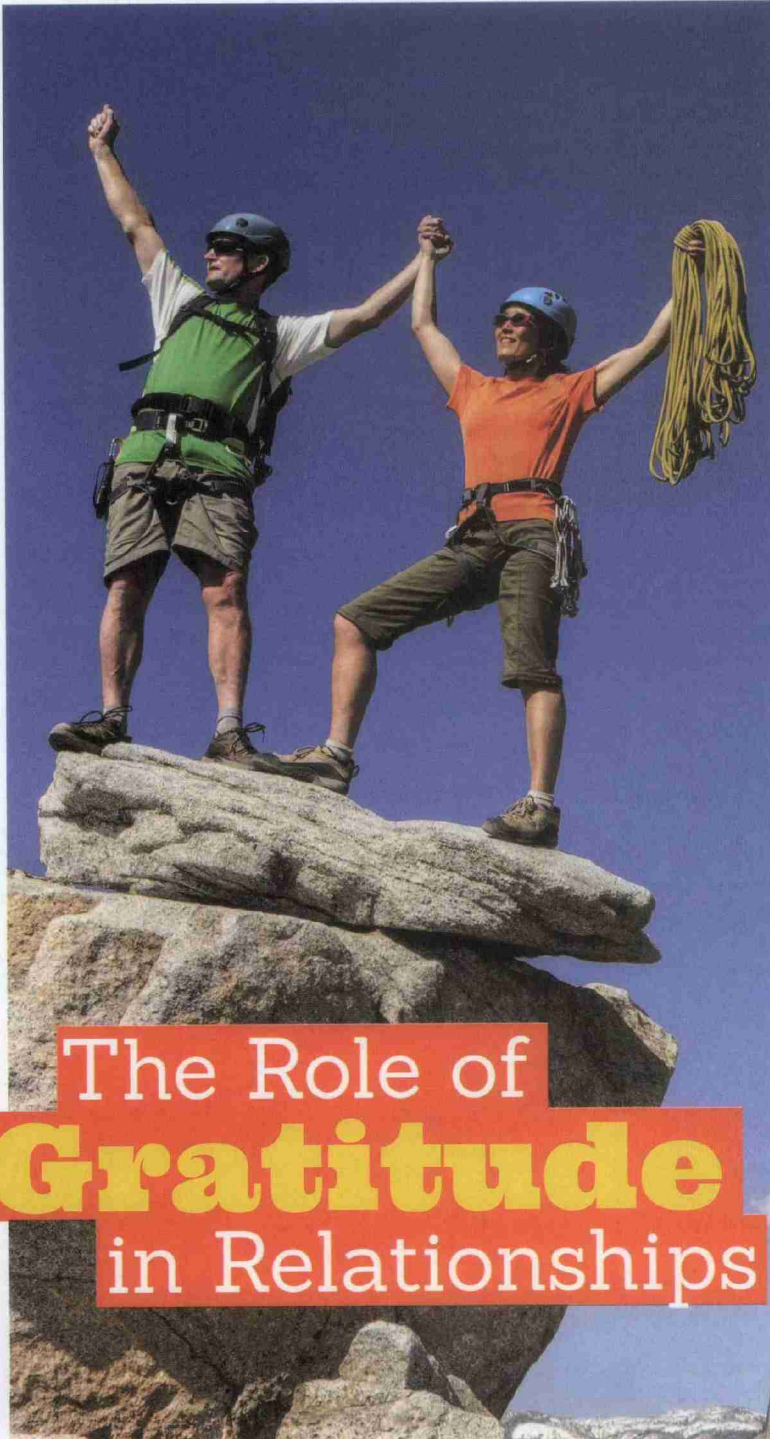


inner balance

Building stronger mind-body connections



The Role of **Gratitude** in Relationships

Every year on my birthday, Ryan sends me off for an incredibly cherished visit to a fabulous local spa for the day. It's one of my favorite traditions. I get a day to feel pampered and have the cares of the world massaged away ... at least momentarily. All I have to do is lie back, relax, and say thankful prayers for being so lucky.

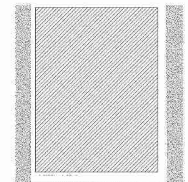
The other 364 days of the year, Ryan and I realize how important it is to our individual sanity to indulge in a bit of "me time," so we try our best to strike a balance of when we're each allowed to be off the parenthood clock. On the rare occasion that my girlfriends and I can plan a night away from our duties at home, I give my goodnight kisses and hand over the reins to the man of the house. Pass this mama a glass of red wine and a gab session with the girls, and I'm a happy camper. On the flip side, if we wake up to a fresh-powder day in the winter, or a cool day full of sunshine in the summer, I practically shove Ryan out the door with his snowboard or mountain bike. Without that time to enjoy his passions, he would not be the man I fell in love with, and I want that man around for a really, really long time.

Part of a healthy relationship is not just creating time with each other, but creating time *for* each other. It's making sure that your partner nourishes the hobbies and passions and interests that make up the person he or she fell in love with, and vice versa. Not only is it a way of keeping resentment at a minimum, but by encouraging your partner to do what he or she loves, you are saying: *I love you. I appreciate you. I am grateful for you.*

There are few better feelings than those.

Happy life, happy wife ... and partner

In a study published by the *Journal of*



Personality and Social Psychology in 2012, Amie Gordon and her colleagues found that people who feel more appreciated by their romantic partners report being more appreciative of their partners. Here's what their results revealed: When you are feeling the most grateful for your significant other, you are more committed to making your relationship last. When you are more committed to making your relationship last, you are more responsive to the needs of the one you love and become a better and more caring listener. When you are a better and more caring listener, your partner feels more appreciated by you. When your partner feels more appreciated by you, they feel more grateful for you—and the cycle begins again. As Gordon said, "By promoting a cycle of generosity, gratitude can actually help relationships thrive."

But not only can gratitude help those in the midst of good times get to better times, it can help those in an otherwise healthy relationship experiencing tough times breeze past them. According to researchers at the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, "When we hit a rocky patch, this research suggests, it's the upward spiral of gratitude that encourages us to risk vulnerability, tune into our partner's needs, and resolve the conflict, rather than turning away from him or her." It builds security and helps partners recognize the true value of their relationship.



According to a study by Terri Orbuch, PhD, author of *5 Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great*, the happiest couples are those who often say thank you to each other. In an article for the *Huffington Post*, Orbuch wrote that 61 percent of the couples she studied "said that their spouses 'often' made them feel good about the kind of person they are." The gratitude she studied came from "words, gestures, or acts" that let partners know that they were "noticed, appreciated, respected,

loved, or desired." She didn't mention exorbitant purchases or fantastical adventures. She mentioned words, kindnesses, and small gestures—the little things of this life.

«I'll never forget the day Ryan was at work and I found a sweet surprise on the shower wall. He had used the letters the kids play with in the bath to spell out "ILU"—our abbreviation for "I love you." The rest of the day, I couldn't stop smiling. So sweet. So simple. So incredibly special.

Have you shown your partner you appreciate him or her lately? Whether it's through a hug, a note, or even a simple thank-you, tell your partner while you have the chance. As the great French novelist Marcel Proust said, "Let's be grateful for those who give us happiness; they are the charming gardeners who make our soul bloom."

You never know what tomorrow will bring, but you certainly have the power to share the happiness you feel today. I've even included a list of suggestions so you can't use the excuse that you couldn't think of anything!

» **Send them flowers** or a cool bamboo plant at work with a note that says "I miss you."

» **On a starry night, put the kids to bed**, break open a bottle of your favorite "poison," lay down side by side on a cozy blanket, and watch for shooting stars. Make wishes for each other and your future.

» **Carve your initials on a tree** that stands in a spot your partner won't be able to miss—maybe it's on a favorite hiking trail, or maybe it's in your front yard. Just make sure it's at eye level.

» **Just as Ryan did for me, create a list for your partner of the many reasons you love him or her.** Start it with "I love you because . . ." and let the words flow onto the paper. Believe me, your partner will appreciate every single one.

» **Schedule date nights.**

I married my husband because he's my favorite person on earth. What's better than giving back to myself (and hopefully to him) by sharing a night with the person I chose to share my life with?

» **If date night is a good idea, then date weekend is even better, right?** Plan

a getaway to a nearby town, or even a weekend stay at a local hotel. Go visit friends, see the sights of a town you've always had on your bucket list, or just get a change of scenery. The resultant positive change in your relationship will be worth it.

» **Stockpile greeting cards.** Go through your stash on

a day that is in threat of never being remembered or one that will be remembered for all bad reasons. After writing sweet nothings in the card, put it in a spot your honey won't be able to miss. Think computer screen or bathroom sink or refrigerator. You may just turn that day into one of the best ever.

» **There's no time like the present to learn from the lessons of the past.**

Think of the significant relationships from your life and list five things you learned from them to better yourself from here on out. Understanding the reason for an ending can give you a greater vision of how to create new beginnings and better forever. **EF**

Adapted from HAPPILY EVER AFTER: THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF A GRATEFUL HEART by TRISTA SUTTER. Reprinted courtesy of Da Capo Lifelong Books.