

## News & Announcements

### About the Interviewees

Sarala Godine and Delaney Tosh are the Victoria-based developers of the **gratOodle**, a simple counter to help track feelings of gratitude as they come up through the day.

The gratOodle can be used in many ways to develop and draw attention to gratitude.

Visit their website: [www.gratoodle.com](http://www.gratoodle.com) for tips and suggestions about how to bring more gratitude into your life.

### Books on Gratitude

The How of Happiness. Lyubomirsky, Sonja. 2007: Penguin Books: Toronto.

Thank You Power. Norville, Deborah. 2007: Thomas Nelson: Dallas.

### STR in the Community

STR runs workshops for middle school and high school level students, parents and teachers.

#### Workshop Topics Include:

- ▶ Study Skills
- ▶ Exam Preparation
- ▶ Memory Techniques
- ▶ Oceanography

If you are interested in hosting a talk by Smart Tutor Referrals, please contact us.

*30-45 minute talks for peer tutors are offered free of charge as a community service to support students, tutors and schools.*

## Gratitude & Learning

*This first newsletter for 2010 focuses on gratitude and its impact on learning. The article is an interview with Sarala Godine and Delaney Tosh, Victoria-based creators of the gratOodle, a simple counter to help track feelings of gratitude as they come up through the day.*

### STR: What is gratitude?

According to Dr. Robert Emmons of the University of California, gratitude is “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation for life.”

Sarala: To use an old cliché, gratitude is a way of seeing your glass as half full instead of half empty. And you can train yourself to do that. Some people have a natural tendency to see the glass as half empty. Seeing emptiness, you'll have a cloud over your thinking.

Delaney: Gratitude is a way of savouring your life and enjoying what's there. It's a strategy for happiness, a great way to move out of worry and concern. You're not able to carry a sense of gratitude and carry thoughts of worry at the same time.

Studies that compare those who reflect on gratitude to those who don't have proven these **benefits to gratitude**:

- ▶ fewer physical symptoms,
- ▶ feeling better about their lives as a whole,
- ▶ more optimistic about upcoming events,
- ▶ more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals (academic, interpersonal and health-based),
- ▶ higher reported levels of the positive states of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy,
- ▶ more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or having offered emotional support to another,
- ▶ greater amounts of high energy positive moods, a greater sense of feeling connected to others, more optimistic ratings of one's life, and better sleep duration and sleep quality,
- ▶ more positive attitudes toward school and their families.

### STR: How can gratitude affect one's ability to learn and to be open to new ideas?

D: When we're focused on worry and concern, thoughts go to the challenge and difficulty and what's not working. If you can find something to be grateful for, you've opened your thoughts in a new way. You can then learn something new about the situation. You become less cluttered in your thinking and enhance your ability to see opportunities, learn new things and try out new strategies.

S: It's like if a car gets stuck in the snow and keeps spinning its wheels, it'll go nowhere. If we are stuck in a rut and don't change our attitude, we will see things from one perspective only. When we're excited about life and feel grateful it can allow us to see things in a whole new light. This helps us to become more creative.

D: I use gratitude in my coaching with business and corporate clients. I notice people tend to stay stuck in a problem when they keep looking at it from the 'problem' angle and seeing it as a problem with a negative impact. Through the coaching process, I get them to look at what they might be learning in the experience, what they might be grateful for or what the benefits might be in the 'negative' situation. (Essentially this is asking people to look for what they are grateful for even in a negative situation. And it's always 'the learning'.) Once they start to explore the learning and what's there for them, they are then able to go back and see other options for how they can be or other actions they can take to move toward a solution. It works like a charm every time.

D: Coming from a perspective of looking for what you're grateful for in every situation, you're able to formulate other ideas for what to do.

S: And feel a whole lot better in doing it since your load feels lighter.

## About Us

We provide **1-on-1, in-home tutorial support** throughout Victoria, Saanich and Sooke.

STR was established in Victoria, BC in 2002 and has built a solid reputation for creativity and professionalism.

**With over 50 tutors**, we are able to find the best match for each student. Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals. They are carefully screened and chosen specially to match the needs and learning styles of each student.

**Our goal is** to enhance students' skills and to cultivate learning confidence through support that is truly individualized: matched specifically to each student's needs, recognizing each student's unique talents and abilities.

*We support families in education.*

For more information and resources, visit us on-line at:

[www.SmartTutorReferrals.com](http://www.SmartTutorReferrals.com)

## Contact Us

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D: A friend recently did a study of the brain that I participated in. He hooked people up to measure EEG activity (recording overall activity of the millions of neurons in the brain). This study was interesting. They measured our brains as we were playing a game where we had to find objects. What I noticed is that each person had a strategy and used it every time no matter what. Then the experimenters changed the way the game worked. Everyone tried their old strategy first and of course it didn't work. We all tend to be habitual; wanting to do things the same old way until something knocks us out of the pattern.

Taking it back to gratitude, I think that if we can look at situations in a new light, and find what it is that we are happy about, or at least grateful for, in any situation, we can take ourselves out of that patterned way of thinking and, therefore, be open to learning.

Dr. Alice Isen at Cornell University discovered that, "Happy people [are] better able to engage their imaginations, less constrained by assumptions. They [are] more flexible in their thinking, perceiving unusual but sensible ways of categorizing material and relationships between categories that at first glance seem...unrelated."

D: There's actually different activity in the brain when you feel grateful and happier, more enthusiastic, alert, engaged in life.

When we're unhappy or stressed, our higher level brain functioning shuts down and our body engages in fight or flight responses. Our frontal and pre-frontal cortexes are all about strategizing, but when you are stressed, the flow of energy is shifted to the limbic system which regulates your flight or fight responses. Being in this mode doesn't serve you well when you're sitting down to strategize or when you're in a stressful situation like a test.

When we notice what we're grateful for, we stop ourselves from getting stressed. We're better able to strategize and to pay attention to what is happening and what people are saying.

### **STR: How is gratitude important to students, parents and educators?**

S: Having discussions with kids about gratitude, helps children learn not to take things for granted. It helps them to cultivate deeper values and notice things they had not paid attention to in the past.

D: Imagine classrooms of students acknowledging themselves. They'd be more likely to perform random acts of kindness. We have the capacity to create a classroom of more engaged, more helpful kids through teaching gratitude.

S: Students and parents can start to focus on what they're good at; celebrating and giving permission to build self esteem.

D: Several years ago, a Port Moody principal, who is now known for her 'Bullybeware' program, developed a code of conduct for her school. One of the strategies was to provide regular and timely recognition for positive behaviours and contributions to the school's culture. It seemed to me that essentially, everyone was engaging in expressing gratitude for what they wanted more of in their school's culture. The purpose was to support everyone in developing better self-esteem and respect for others. The net effect was a school that captured a lot of attention for their success with reducing the incidents of bullying in their school.

S: I used to run workshops in schools on the topic of bullying. Low self esteem is definitely one of the factors in bullying. If we can help kids to recognize their positive qualities, their strengths, what they can be grateful for about themselves and others, their self esteem will improve. This way you focus on strengths.

D: At exam time – how do you cope with that situation? What strategy are you using? Being grateful for all the studying you've done, you'll be less likely to go to a stressed space.

### **STR: How can one cultivate gratitude?**

- ▶ Notice what you're grateful for
- ▶ Express gratitude to the people around you
- ▶ Notice others' contributions to our lives
- ▶ Itemize things you're grateful for
- ▶ Look for how your glass is half full
- ▶ Look for what can be learned in situations
- ▶ Discuss it: at the dinner table, with friends, in the classroom
- ▶ Keep a 'Best Possible Self' diary
- ▶ Journal
- ▶ Use a gratOodle

S: Gratitude is an action; it's like exercise. If you just think about being fit, you won't get fit. If you want to be grateful and bring happiness into your life you have to train yourself to notice all the things you have to be grateful for in a day. The more you notice the more you find and the better you feel.