

Leading through Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving was one of many common Pilgrim responses to what they saw as God's provision. The event took place in 1621 after a successful growing season. President Lincoln wove it into the fabric of American culture in 1863, declaring it a day of "Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

In the years that have passed, the clarity as to the recipient of our praise has become muddled as the single-mindedness of our religious beliefs has changed. For many Americans, Thanksgiving has become a holiday involving good food and very little thought about giving thanks.

To be fair, Thanksgiving is one of the few days when, by tradition, we seek out family and/or friends to share a meal. Thankfulness for these special people in our lives is implied.

Thanksgiving is also the only time when before beginning the meal, we traditionally invite everyone at the table to share something for which they are thankful. Clearly, an overt invitation to thankfulness.

But as leaders, we are responsible to guide ourselves, our families, our communities, and ultimately, our nation to take a more mindful approach to truly giving thanks.

Leadership skill: Lead by truly being thankful.

Thankfulness unfortunately tends to lie in the gap between what we expect and what we receive. We live in an abundant nation, and it is too easy for most of us to look at what we have and believe it is lacking. Even when we consider the plight of poorer individuals or nations, we often assume their conditions to be the natural consequences of their choices and/or a call for us to assist in meeting their needs. Yes, comparison *can* prompt us to be thankful, but too often it does not.

What if we gave up our expectation, our sense of entitlement, and we were simply thankful for what we have? I am not talking about complacency that accepts current conditions as they are, good or

bad, with little thought to vision and goals. I am talking about being thankful along the way.

What are the behaviors of true thankfulness?

- Focusing more on what you have, than what you do not have.
- Knowing what you are thankful for and to whom.
- Recognizing the value of the kindness that you receive and kindness that you give.
- Declaring “creating healthy relationships” more important than “accumulating more stuff.”
- Saying, texting, emailing, and writing “Thank you!” every time you have the opportunity.

I am sure you see a theme emerging here. Our nation’s emphasis on materialism, and de-emphasis on the Divine as the source of all blessing, has left us a people that too often misses the endless opportunities that we have every day to be thankful.

How are you doing, 0 – 10, leading by truly being thankful?

I humbly admit that I am at about a 4. Too often I focus anxious creative energies, starting from a place of what I believe is needed and I totally miss the opportunity to be thankful for what *is*. But innovation and thankfulness are not mutually exclusive.

So, here is our Thanksgiving Challenge. I invite all of us to consider the charge that our creative juices would receive if we lived in the optimism that is inherent in a life of thankfulness. Let us notice what we have both materially and in our relationships, be grateful for it, cultivate it, and rejoice (give Praise) in the process that is Life.