

Gratitude is the path to happiness, author says

BY JENNIFER GARZA
SACRAMENTO BEE

Here's a seemingly impossible task for many. In the middle of your next busy day, put aside thoughts of that looming deadline at work or the kids' soccer schedule and take a few minutes to be thankful for what you have.

Chances are, you'll be happier if you do.

For the past nine years, Robert A. Emmons, a professor of psychology at the University of California-Davis, has been studying the role that gratitude plays in happiness. Turns out, grateful people are happy people.

"People who show gratitude experience higher levels of joy and other positive emotions," says Emmons. "They also seem to be less bothered by minor illnesses and actually take better care of their health."

Gratitude — how to get it and what it does for you — is the subject of Emmons' new book, *Thanks: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*.

Emmons, one of the leading scholars in the positive psychology movement, began studying gratitude when assigned the topic at a conference. Emmons collaborated on research with Michael McCullough, a psychologist at the University of Miami.

The book is a culmination of their work. "It's a blend of information and inspiration on how people can create for themselves the best lives they can," he said.

Gratitude wasn't a natural subject for Emmons.

"Psychologists have a long

history of studying things they're bad at," says Emmons. "I was always someone who took things for granted."

A lot of people have obstacles to gratitude, Emmons learned in his research. The demands of everyday life and a desire not to be dependent on others are two of the biggest.

"Gratitude is the opposite of personal autonomy; you're acknowledging you're dependent on others," says Emmons. "And that can be hard for some people."

But those who make a conscious effort to show gratitude

report higher levels of positive emotions and lower levels of depression and stress, according to Emmons. Grateful people also have more satisfying relationships, he says. "They have a greater sense of connectedness."

So how can people become more grateful?

Emmons lists 10 ways to learn how to express gratitude. The lists includes everything from writing a gratitude journal, to learning prayers of gratitude from different religious traditions to using the language of someone who is grateful.

"This is an attitude that has to be developed and worked on," says Emmons. "It's no coincidence that many religions talk about it as a spiritual discipline."

After studying the science of gratitude, Emmons now plans to more fully explore the benefits of gratitude, particularly in the area of health.

For now, he's taking the time to stop and be grateful for what he has.

"I'm grateful that I can study the topic of gratitude for a living, for my family and for my health," says Emmons.