We often say “thank you” just because we think we should or because we’ve been trained to be thankful in certain circumstances. We say “thank you” to someone who has helped us or given us a gift, but this is not all there is to Gratitude. From a scientific perspective Gratitude is not just an expression of thanks to the giver: it is also a positive emotion that serves a social and biological purpose for the receiver. According to one researcher, “Gratitude is an emotion we feel in response to receiving something good which is undeserved.”

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:
Although many of us say a blessing before a meal, most of us don’t completely recognize how fortunate we are. For this exercise, we invite you to have a meal of a can of beans. Nothing else. Just the beans. There’s no warming them up or pouring the beans into a bowl. That defeats the purpose of the exercise.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:
- When was the last time you said the words “Thank you”?
- When was the last time you really meant it?

Gratitude is more than feeling thankful: it is a deeper appreciation for someone (or something) that produces longer lasting positivity. Not only that, Gratitude is good for you.

What You’ll Need:
- Cans of beans that can be safely eaten directly from the can.
- A can opener
- Spoons

Facilitator Tip:
- Encourage participants to not only appreciate the usual foods they eat but also the nourishment beans provide. This is an opportunity to become a more mindful eater, develop an “attitude of Gratitude,” and enjoy the ritual and experience the positive emotions of sharing a meal brings (regardless of what the meal is).

KEY OBJECTIVES:
- Discover and develop a sense of genuine Gratitude.
- Think about how you’ve felt Gratitude in the past and what you may currently be taking for granted.

You simply grab a spoon, open up the can, and dig in. If you think this is just too much for you, turn in your spoon and eat the beans with your fingers.

The most powerful thing about this exercise is its simplicity. Eating beans from a can is much easier than cooking up a whole meal and ending up with the dishes.

Some participants may choose to not engage, knowing as they do that a hot meal is waiting for them at home. This is yet another example of something most of us take for granted, but in order for this to work, a critical mass of the participants should be willing to try it.
REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What is there to be grateful for in a can of cold beans?
- What things do you usually take for granted when you have a meal?
- What else do you take for granted or fail to be grateful for?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Why is it important for someone to have gratitude?
- What is the difference between someone who practices gratitude and someone who does not?
- How might this strategy of developing gratitude serve you in other areas of your life?
- To whom will you express Gratitude for the good things you have every day? How will you express it?

CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this Gratitude exercise is to realize and appreciate what we have. Every day, we are able to eat all sorts of foods, flown or shipped in from all over the world, refrigerated and processed, served to order. And this is easy to take for granted for those who have food security. There are many other things in life to be grateful for that we tend to overlook. Take some time every day to develop your sense of Gratitude.

Grateful people experience enhanced well being, deeper relationships, improved optimism, stronger self-control, better mental and physical health, and an overall better life. Cultivating an “attitude of gratitude” begins by recognizing the good things we already have.

REFERENCES

- https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-appreciation/
- https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/