Giving Thanks and Practicing Gratitude

By Barbara Roberts

November brings our focus to gratitude with the Thanksgiving holiday. I have always liked Thanksgiving best, because it can be so simple—sharing food and love—and it works for so many faith traditions and cultures. We have different things for which we are thankful, different family and friends with whom we share a meal or visit, but Thanksgiving celebrates the good things. Thanksgiving is not only about the harvest and safe procurement of a winter’s food supply, but the sharing and community that grows it. We set aside time for reflecting on whatever helps to sustain us, to share with others the things that we appreciate—blessings large or small, in others or in nature, heart or mind, or physical environment.

There are many known health benefits to actually practicing gratitude beyond the Thanksgiving holiday. A greater sense of wellbeing, optimism—so critical these days—and energy is fostered by noticing and expressing gratitude regularly. People who cultivate awareness of gratitude report improved sleep and productivity toward goals, reduced stress and depression, and faster healing.

I have some recent experience with the healing effects of gratitude. I sustained a spinal injury in an accidental 30’ fall at my cottage in August. The gratitude started when I hit the ground and checked for functioning toes. There they were—wiggling. If my toes could wiggle, the rest of me could be alright, too. A small but huge thing to appreciate— toes. The gratitude only grew as family and EMTs rushed to help me, surgeons repaired me, nurses helped manage the pain, and recovery began. Gratitude for MSU health insurance, flextime and remote work provisions that enable me to do what I can from home, pacing my return to work as my recovery progresses. Gratitude for my MSU colleagues who sent well wishes, took on extra roles, and phoned me in to meetings. Gratitude for the moments of stillness every day, noticing the blessings always around us—sun on a brilliant fall leaf, a meal made by a friend, flowers of summer turning to fall seed pods—so beautiful! Had I really noticed before?

I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving, sharing your gratitude with others. Illuminate the darkening days of November with appreciation for whatever goodness and beauty surrounds you. You will feel better, function better, and perform better when you notice and express the things you are grateful for.

Sources:

Diane Cox is the Manager of the Office of Sponsored Programs. In this capacity, she supervises five employees. The nomination packet evidenced the positive leadership that Cox exemplifies and that her leadership has created a positive team-based work environment for her employees. One letter of support stated, “Diane empowers us and believes in us to get a job done; she makes us want to be better employees and individuals.” Another letter referenced her encouragement of their work-life balance and her determination to help each team member achieve career success. The letter stated, “She is always eager to help us in furthering our careers at MSU.” Congratulations, Diane Cox!

Terry Curry is the Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Human Resources. In this capacity, he supervises four employees. According to the testimonies expressed in the nomination packet, Curry creates a supportive and “family like” work environment for his employees. Nominators for Curry’s award highlighted his respect for those he supervises and his ability to create a humanizing work environment. One letter of support stated, “His working style and compassionate personality has created a work environment that fosters a genuine understanding and value of each of our personal lives.” Another letter stated, “He continues to show me every day that he cares about me as a person, and not just as an employee. His actions show that he trusts me as the professional that he hired.” Congratulations, Terry Curry!

Kirk Domer is an Associate Professor in Scene Design and is the Chairperson of the Department of Theatre. In this capacity, he supervises 28 employees. “He celebrates success, rewards a job well done and creates an environment that honors each and every person,” wrote a nominator. Domer is known on his team for acknowledging and appreciating everyone’s contributions to the department. Another letter of support stated, “He is the most caring, compassionate, supportive administrator I have met in my 33 years of employment at MSU.” It is evident from the nomination and support letters that Domer has created a supportive and flexible work environment. Congratulations, Kirk Domer!
Richard Lenski is a Hannah Distinguished Professor in Plant, Soil, and Microbial Sciences. In this capacity, he supervises 18 employees. One letter in the nomination packet stated, “Dr. Lenski’s approach to the profession begins and ends with a truly unconditional and unbounded commitment to the well-being and best interest of everyone in his life.” Additional letters of support made it clear that Dr. Lenski creates a welcoming environment and supports everyone he works with. Another letter of support stated, “He is the most compassionate person you would ever meet.” The nomination packet demonstrated the many qualities that make Dr. Lenski an outstanding supervisor. Congratulations, Richard Lenski!

Elizabeth Simmons is the former Dean of Lyman Briggs College and former Coordinator of the Academic Advancement Network. In these roles, she supervised 50 employees. According to the nomination packet, “She emphasizes a work-life balance for those under her supervision, and models this herself.” Additional letters of support for Dr. Simmons highlighted her ability to empower and support her staff and faculty—working with “dignity, respect and integrity.” One letter of support stated, “Under Dean Simmons’ leadership, Lyman Briggs has developed a work culture of respect and inclusion.” Congratulations, Elizabeth Simmons! (Dr. Simmons recently took a position at another university. We wish her the best in her new role.)

Andrew Widner is the Assistant Director of Finance and Operations for the Kellogg Biological Station. In this capacity, he supervises six employees. The nomination packet for Widner included statements such as, “He is patient, yet holds people accountable for their success. He takes personal interest in each person’s success and how he can help them achieve their best,” “Not only is he teaching me new skills, but he is leading by example,” and “Andy embodies the definition of trust. He has an intense loyalty to his direct reports.” Throughout the letters of support, it was evident that Widner manages his staff with flexibility and trust. Many people who wrote letters told personal stories about how meaningful his understanding of their unique circumstances was and how it helped them succeed at their jobs. Congratulations, Andrew Widner!
Fatherhood Forum Recap

By Dom Knighten, Fatherhood Forum Committee Member

On October 6, 2017, several Michigan State University and community organizations held another successful Fatherhood Forum for the greater Lansing area. With this being the third annual forum, several new and returning participants were in attendance, ranging from committee members, guest speakers, vendors, and registrants.

Throughout the course of the day’s events, 77 participants were in attendance. These participants varied from MSU students, faculty, parents from the greater Lansing area, and teen dads from Benton Harbor, Michigan. Guests were invited to select and vote on a series of photographs highlighting fatherhood, which were submitted to the photo contest.

This year’s forum began with a keynote delivered by Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald. Dr. Fitzgerald’s extensive body of research on fatherhood, provided a lens on issues that are prevalent in America today, and which span diverse social and racial demographics, complementing the eclectic perspectives on fatherhood in attendance that day.

Parenting, in particular fatherhood, encompasses a wide spectrum of areas of concern. The forum specializes in addressing many of these concerns, as demonstrated by the wide range of breakout sessions during the event. The forum continues to incorporate feedback from previous years’ attendees.

One of the most unique features of the forum, which began at the first Fatherhood Forum in 2015, are the panel of dads that hold an open discussion for the attendees. Facilitated this year by Dr. Theodore Ransaw, six panelists ranging from a stay-at-home father, former NBA player, entrepreneurs, graduate students, and distinguished Michigan State University faculty, participated in very engaging conversations with the group regarding their experiences as fathers. The breakout sessions in many ways set the tone for the course of the day’s events, but the panel of dads really solidified the openness and vulnerability that these discussions conjured up regarding fatherhood. The strength of the forum is in the effectiveness of being able to make connections with attendees through sensitive conversation. The interactive conversations between panelists and attendees really struck a nerve of compassion.

The afternoon was wrapped up with enriching “beauty shop” and “barbershop” sessions for the men and women. Many of the topics discussed throughout the day are brought up in these “shops”. The day concluded with Dr. Theodore Ransaw addressing the topic of “Dad Play”.

As the forum continues to grow, the core values of the event remain evident, as participants leave not only educated on matters involving parenting, but inspired, and filled with passion to pursue a healthy lifestyle of parenting.

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Inspirational Woman of the Year Award

2018 CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Center for Gender in Global Context at Michigan State University is seeking nominations for the Inspirational Woman of the Year Award. If you know an inspirational woman you believe should be recognized for her commitment to Michigan State University and the global community, you are encouraged to nominate her for this prestigious award.

The Award:

The Inspirational Woman of the Year Award recognizes the achievements of women staff and faculty affiliated with Michigan State University (including main campus and all off-site and satellite campuses). The award highlights woman-identified individuals who demonstrate integrity, leadership, quality performance, integrative and inclusive action, and influence on campus and in the global community. The goal is to elevate and advance MSU’s culture of appreciation for the courageous and empowering work of the women change agents at MSU. Three individuals will be honored—one in each nomination category: Professional Achievement, Culture of Empowerment, and Community Engagement. Recipients of the Inspirational Woman of the Year Award will be recognized in spring 2018.

Deadline for nominations: Friday, November 10, 2017

For more information, visit http://gencen.isp.msu.edu/about/inspirational-woman-award/.

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In Review
Understanding the Perspective
Lessons Learned at the 2nd Annual WorkLife Conference

By Tarren Leszczynski

Do you ever face the challenge of feeling frustrated when you disagree with a coworker? During the 2nd annual WorkLife Conference on “The Changing World of Work,” Organizational Change Management Lead and Training Analyst at Board of Water & Light, Rebecca Rostar, discussed the importance of understanding generational differences in the workforce. To appreciate these differences, we must be aware of them and why they may exist, and that is half the battle for many working individuals.

There are four generations currently collaborating with one another in the workplace each with different values, characteristics, and ethics. How did they develop this way? Rostar challenges individuals to think of historical influences that may have an effect on their traits:

Traditionalists: Those born from 1925-1945 went through WWII, The Great Depression, and the New Deal. Living through these difficult times, traditionalists exemplify traits such as being fiscally conservative, prefer traditional working hours, consider manual labor as hard work, and believe in hierarchy and sacrifice.

Baby Boomers: Individuals born from 1946-1964 are considered the workaholics of the workplace. Living through the Civil Rights Movement, Cold War, Watergate, and assassinations, they are already becoming vastly different than their parents. They were given higher access to education therefore they are competitive, optimistic, and open to change.

Generation X: If you were born from 1965-1981, you may consider yourself a “Latchkey Kid.” These were the years where computers and internet became more relevant, television exposed more cultural differences, and divorce rates started to increase. Individuals raised during this time are known to be independent, resourceful, and began the lean towards a more flexible work environment.

Generation Y: The most recent generation active in the workforce are those who were born from 1982-1999. These individuals experienced 9/11 as a child, have the most age diverse parents, are engaged in more after school activities than any generation in the past, and see college as a very common direction before entering their career. These individuals become excited over change, are aware of diversity, and are techno savvy.

Take a moment to understand yourself, your preferences, ways of work, and your generational differences. It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong generational preferences, but it is key to expose yourself to all generational thoughts and ideas. Next time you disagree with a coworker, recollect your thoughts on generational differences and seek the positives of having a diverse team at hand.

Ms. Ellen Galinsky was the conference keynote speaker and also presented a workshop on “Making Work and Life Work for You and Others.”

Dr. Roger Baldwin gave a riveting presentation about the changing nature of retirement and shared some new strategies.

Thank you to Kiana Elkins, Courtney Kosloski (pictured), Tarren Leszczynski, and Laraine Walton for helping at the conference!
Navigating Life with Resilience

Wednesday, November 15, 2017
8:30AM—10:00AM, Chittenden Hall, Room 110

Balancing all of your responsibilities can feel impossible sometimes. The more resilient you are, the easier it is to be high performing without losing your bearings. Resilience is a skill you can develop to help you respond to adversity and challenges more effectively, lined up with your core values. Come learn what resilience is, how you can increase your level of resilience, and how you can take advantage of the resources on campus to help you develop this important work/life skill. Presenter: Lisa Laughman, Employee Assistance Program & Health4U.

RSVP for Women’s Networking Association seminars by emailing worklife@msu.edu or calling (517) 353-1635.

This semester’s theme is “Empowerment & Transformation.” The mission of the Women’s Networking Association is to connect professional women across campus through meaningful and empowering relationships. Providing an opportunity for women to network and support one another is an essential step for building women’s leadership at Michigan State University and in the Greater Lansing community. Events are free and open to all.

Mentoring is one of the key components for promoting career success. It has been increasingly recognized as a bilateral exchange between a mentee and a network of mentors, with one of the primary goals being to increase the knowledge, skills and strategic moves of mentees in preparation for and advancement in current or future professional objectives. We will discuss the importance of constructing one’s personal mentoring roadmap and also provide guidance in initiating this mapping process. Participants will have the opportunity to increase their understanding of the role of mentoring in their own careers and professional development, to begin drafting a personal mentoring roadmap, and to expand their appreciation for the potential efficacy of engaging a mentoring roadmap tool in their careers.

Presenter: Dr. Beronda Montgomery, Academic Advancement Network.

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION SEMINARS

Surviving (and Enjoying) the Holidays as a Dementia Caregiver
Wednesday, November 8, 2017
from 6-7:30pm

This program addresses the feelings, challenges, expectations and exhaustion brought on by our traditional celebration of the holidays and offers caregivers some alternatives designed to maintain safety, familiarity, comfort and inclusion for their loved ones and themselves. Changes in gift-giving and merry-making can improve the holidays for both the dementia caregiver and person with memory loss. We will discuss ways to make holiday celebrations more successful and enjoyable. Co-sponsored by MSU Federal Credit Union and the MSU WorkLife Office.

Know the 10 Warning Signs
Thursday, December 12, 2017
from 6-7:30pm

Know the 10 Warning Signs is an introductory program that provides attendees with an understanding of the difference between age-related memory loss and Alzheimer’s and what to do if they or someone they know has signs of the disease. Attendees will view video footage of real people who are living with the early stages of dementia and their families addressing fears and myths associated with Alzheimer’s disease. Co-sponsored by MSU Federal Credit Union and the MSU WorkLife Office.

To register, visit: https://www.msufcu.org/events/

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