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### Episode 165 - The Science Behind Gratitude

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*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Welcome, everyone, to another episode of Empowering You Organically. I'm your host, Jonathan Hunsaker, joined by my co-host, TeriAnn Trevenen.

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* Hey, everyone!

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Today, we are talking about a very important subject that I think gets overlooked often, and we're going to talk about gratitude. And one of the reasons we're talking about this, I mean we're coming up on the holiday season right now, and the holidays are hard for a lot of people. There's a lot of emotions around it.

And really, if we're going to have this conversation about achieving optimum health, we cannot forget about our emotions and how we control our emotions, process our emotions, handle our emotions, and gratitude, believe it or not, I mean the science behind it is phenomenal for having gratitude and what that can do for your emotional wellbeing and your overall health.

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* For sure. And at this time of year, with the holidays coming around, I think people often see the holidays as this happy, beautiful, wonderful time, but the reality is that more people actually struggle with depression during the holiday season than any other time of year. There's a lot of things that come around the holidays that can make the holidays tough – family, relationships, food, money.

We have these standards that we've set in the world, what the holidays should look like, and we try to fit into those boxes, and that can really be tough for all of us to manage. And so, I think that gratitude is super important at this time of year to really focus on the things in our life that are most important, which is really what the holidays are all about.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Well, and I mean I think we can get pulled into the whole idea that we need more, we need to go buy more, we need to get more, we need to give a bunch of gifts, you know, we need to fill up the Christmas tree with tons of presents, and what are our kids going to think if we don't have the whole room full of boxes and presents and all of that.

And I think that we get lost, and I'm not going to say the true meaning of the holidays and all of that, but we get lost in this idea that we need more, when if we could just take a minute and get really centered on the things that we all already have, and the wealth that we have, whether that's money, whether that's love, whether that's relationships, whether that's kids, whether that's just having a roof over your head, whatever that is, and getting really present, it helps battle that idea that we need to go buy more and that we have to get more and do more, because we can really appreciate the stuff that we have in our lives.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** For sure. You know? Don't just take our word for it in the things that we've been sharing so far. I mean science has proven that feelings of gratitude can change your brain, your physical health, your emotional health, they can help to combat depression and anxiety. And we're going to talk a little bit more about that as time goes on.

But first, let's talk a little bit more about what gratitude really is. Robert Emmons, who's perhaps the world's most leading scientific expert on gratitude, argues that gratitude has two key components, which he describes in a Greater Good Essay, "Why Gratitude Is Good," which we'll link in our show notes.

First, he writes it's an affirmation of goodness. , which I think this first one is really interesting, because, going back to what I said earlier about the holidays, it's all about stuff. I mean we already have Christmas stuff in the stores. Like Christmas stuff was in the stores a month ago, in September.

It's the earliest I've ever seen it. There were Christmas trees at Costco in September. And it's all about stuff, and we talked about gifts being things that we give to people and money we spend, but I love how he words that.

We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received, and I don't necessarily think he's talking about materialistic things, although you can be grateful for those things – a roof over your head, financial stability, maybe you're grateful you didn't have financial stability for a while so you could appreciate financial stability.

There's a lot of gratitude tied to materialistic things, but I think it goes so much further than that when he's talking about gifts. And then he says the second part of gratitude is that we recognize that the sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves. We acknowledge that other people, or even higher powers, or whatever you believe, if you're of a spiritual mindset, gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.

So, gifts that we've received personally, and I think that's more on an individual, personal, emotional level, and then also, the sources of goodness outside of ourselves. And again, that could be materialistic, but I think it more so comes from being grateful for the people around us, the lessons and the experiences and the things we're going through.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** I just think that there's so much that he's covering in these two examples that it goes far beyond the materialistic. And a lot of times, we just go through life, right? We wake up, we do our regular routine, take a shower, brush your teeth, get the kids off to school, go to work.

We do all of these things, and we don't take the time to just stop and appreciate the sunrise, or appreciate the sunset, or that drive to work, or that little bit of time with your kids on the way to school, or all of these little things that has nothing to do with material, it just has to do with life, and we take a lot of things for granted by not just taking a second and really feeling it.

And that's where I think the gratitude really comes in, is because as you're looking for things to be grateful for, you start going down that rabbit hole and you find all of these things that you just—you may not have thought about in weeks, or months, or—you know what I mean? And it just opens this whole abundance mindset, that you have all of these things that are amazing for you in your life, that you just—that they've just become regular, everyday things to you, right?

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Yep.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** And so, getting present to that gratitude and recognizing all of that, I think it really opens you back up to the abundance that's there in the world for you.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Well, and it's interesting you say that, because one other thing that Emmons talks about is that gratitude, from a social aspect, is a relationship-strengthening emotion, because it requires us to see how we've been supported and affirmed by other people. And he also says that, in recognizing this, not only do we appreciate the gifts, but we want to repay them.

This was called by another sociologist, Georg Simmel, "the moral memory of mankind," how gratitude evolves in our lives by strengthening bonds between members of the human race, and then we help each other out, we're giving back. And so, I think it kind of speaks to what you were saying. We recognize what we have, we feel it, it becomes ingrained in us. And then, they talk about us being moved to give back and give that gratitude and put it back out into the world with other people.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** Yeah, just again, it really does connect people, right? When you think about the gratitude, if I think about all the things that you—that I'm grateful for you on, and the things that you've brought to Organixx the company, or to the podcast, or with a friendship, it just changes things. You have a deeper level of respect, you have a deeper level of appreciation, and you don't have all of these, the little nagging things, like "Gosh, she was late to a meeting," or "This happened, that happened," right?

All the little stuff, and that happens with all the things in our lives, whether it's around our kids, whether it's around money, whether it's around our car, it's not starting as well, or whatever it is, like we get caught up in that nag of lack, and that nag of what's wrong, as opposed to getting caught up in that conversation of what's right. And having that different conversation will change your entire day.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Absolutely. So, question. How do you practice gratitude?

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** It's a great question. I'm constantly working on doing it more, right, and being more present to it. So, I think it was Anthony Robbins that had a gratitude exercise that you do first thing in the morning, and you just write down the top three things. While my habit around that hasn't been formed to be consistent, I have started doing that, and when I remember to do it.

Sometimes, it's just a matter of turning off the music in the car and getting present to the things that I have in life and the things that I'm grateful for. But I think, as well as everybody else, we get caught up in life, and just thinking about doing this podcast and researching it more, and all the times that I know that I've gone through the practice of feeling more gratitude, how much better my life was at that time, just reminds me how much more I can do, right?

And not from a judgmental standpoint, because I think we can be a little too hard on ourselves, and now we go down that path, like let me be grateful for actually even knowing these things, and being grateful for stuff and recognizing it, and not going down kind of that blame game. But yeah, I mean I, if I just stop for a second, and I think about it while we're even doing this podcast, and think of the things I'm grateful for, it changes my entire conversation.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** For sure.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** What about you?

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** So, it's funny that you brought up the Tony Robbins thing, because I think I was the one who sent it to you. I've sent it to tons of people in my life. I'm a huge believer in the way he's taught people how to practice gratitude. So, he was on a podcast with Tim Ferris, which is

also another incredible podcast in the podcast industry, and he did, you can find this out on the internet, and we'll link it in the show notes, but it's like a seven-minute clip, and he walks you through how to feel gratitude from a way he's learned how to do it.

And I remember the first time I did it, I was actually sitting in my car and I was having a really hard day, it was at a really hard point in my life, and my kids were both in gymnastics, and I was just right outside of gymnastics sitting in my car, getting some work done, and I was just like really overwhelmed. And so, I started looking for motivational things, which I typically do when I get overwhelmed, and I found this podcast.

And it was just this little clip on gratitude, and I was like searching gratitude, like "I need to feel gratitude right now." And it came up, and I like remembered the first time I actually did it. I cried like so hard. And it often makes me emotional when I do it. But it's a seven-minute practice he walks through on the podcast, and now I kind of have it down to a much shorter time, because it's actually the first thing I do when I wake up in the morning, unless my kids have bombarded me and like our day is just insane.

I typically wake up before my kids and I literally just lay there, and that's the first thing I do is gratitude, and I try to do that every single morning, and in the way that he does it, and I'm not going to go through it here on this podcast. We will, again, link it in the show notes. But it totally changes your perspective on how to feel gratitude, and it's actually about feeling gratitude, not just thinking about it, and it's actually using hard things in your life to feel more gratitude.

And so, I love gratitude, and I try to practice it every single day, and I think when you make it a regular practice, it's a lot harder to feel sad about things going on in the world and in your life. And while I think all of your emotions are important, I think gratitude puts your emotions in perspective. And it's okay to feel everything we feel, and feel sad and depressed and anxious, in hard things, but I think gratitude brings them back to focus in what the meaning of those things are in your life, and that's what his gratitude practice says.

So, I try to practice gratitude every single day. So, that brings us to the scientific research around gratitude, which is really fascinating. It's a huge thing in research to research gratitude. Universities have entire departments that are focused on researching happiness and gratitude. Researchers from Berkley identified how gratitude might actually work on our minds and bodies.

They provided four insights from their research, suggesting what causes the psychological benefits of gratitude. Some of the things that they found in doing their research is that gratitude unshackles us from toxic emotions. This is a huge one because I think it goes back to what I was saying earlier. I think emotions are there for a reason.

We feel things. But I think learning how to feel our emotions and control where our emotions take us is really important, and gratitude can be one of those things, like I said, and I found this for myself, that brings your emotions into perspective. So, it's a really important thing that they found. Another thing is gratitude helps even if you don't share it.

So, just feeling it and experiencing it can change your whole perspective and mindset. And sometimes, it's just for you, and you just need to feel that change. Gratitude benefits take time and they take practice. You might not feel it right away, but over time, it changes.

And like I found that for myself, when I do my morning gratitude, sometimes, one day doesn't change the course of your entire life, or even the course of your day, but I find that as I practice it regularly, I find myself looking for more ways to find gratitude throughout the day, because I started my day thinking about those things. I think that's a big thing.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** Well, it definitely affects your right then and there, in the moment, right? There's no way to go through a gratitude practice and feel gratitude and not have that change your feelings, you emotions right there in that spot. Right, doing it once may not change your life forever, it may not even change the rest of your day, but it will change that moment.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Sure, yeah, absolutely. And also, they found that gratitude has lasting effects on the brain, body, and emotions. So, we're going to talk about a few of those benefits that they found. So, first, they highlight physical. So, stronger immune systems, less bothered by aches and pains, lower blood pressure, exercise more, and they take better care of their health when people practice gratitude, and they sleep longer and feel more refreshed upon waking.

One of the things that stood out to me on this one was less bothered by aches and pains. I feel like gratitude is such a game-changer in how we perceive everything, not just mentally and emotionally, but physically. I think when life is hard and we see life as hard, and we see everything as bad and negative, everything in our life is compounded by that.

I think when we're experiencing disease, or sickness, or body aches and pains, they're worse when we see life as worse than it really is, or bad, or not good. And so, I found that really interesting that the physical affects, gratitude can literally change how you feel physically, and the actions you take physically, because you see life from a more positive perspective.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** Yeah, absolutely, and I had a whole story I was going to tell, and then it just totally lost my mind there, or left my mind. I didn't lose my mind. Btu what was interesting, what you shared here a little bit ago, was gratitude helps even if you don't share it. [0:19:59] And I think

that that's really interesting, because I think we can confuse gratitude with just saying thank you to somebody, or showing appreciation, versus really just kind of feeling that gratitude.

I remember what I was going to say. We talk about the negative feelings that we have in having those hard days, and I feel like social media does a lot of this, right? Because we're constantly seeing everybody's best self, we're seeing everybody through these filtered pictures. They're not just raw pictures, they're filtered, they're smoothed out, they're cleaned up.

And these people always look like they're at their best, our friends, celebrities, all of that. And we go down this path of comparing, and we compare ourselves to them, and we compare the car that we're driving with the guy in the nice, whatever, Cadillac next to us, and we're comparing all of these things.

And just getting really focused and being grateful for the stuff that you have, being grateful that you have a phone that connects you to all of these things, that takes pictures, that you're able to be on social media as opposed to comparing yourself to other people, being grateful that you have a vehicle to drive and are being grateful that you have the roof over your head.

All of these things. And it's no wonder, there's absolutely a physical benefit from it, because if you're constantly living in that "poor me" state, that negative space, all of that, everything gets worse. Your body is tighter, you're feeling more stressed, you have more inflammation. Like all of this stuff plays into it. And absolutely, you're going to feel worse.

And so, anyone out there that thinks that emotions don't play into effect of our health, has no idea what they're talking about. And gratitude is just such—it's a game-changer in the sense that, right, back in the 80s-90s, affirmations were really big. Let's go say our affirmations and we can feel good. And yes, that works.

Maybe that works for a certain period of time. But one thing that absolutely works every time is gratitude and taking a second to just being grateful for the things you have, whether it's just the fact that you're wearing shoes today and you're not having to be barefoot, the fact that you got to eat some breakfast, the fact that you could by a Starbucks coffee, whatever it is. There's no doubt that the gratitude is the exercise that can change everything on an emotional level, which I think affects the physical level.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Yeah. Well, and speaking of emotional/psychological level, some things that they found in benefits when it comes to gratitude: higher levels of positive emotions, more alert, alive, and awake, more joy and pleasure, more optimism and happiness.

And when we go back to thinking about not practicing gratitude, not feeling gratitude can compound the effects of our pain in our body, how we feel, how we perceive our body, and thinking about joy and pleasure, and how that's real, how we really feel those things, how much gratitude impacts what we feel on a physical level, but also, internally as well.

It's super powerful. Also, they found benefits from a social perspective when it comes to practicing gratitude. People who practice gratitude are more helpful, generous, and compassionate. They're more forgiving, they're more outgoing, they feel less lonely and less isolated.

I know for myself, from a social perspective, when I'm practicing gratitude, I see the humanity in things more, I am definitely more understanding and more empathetic of others when I practice gratitude in my own life, because I think practicing gratitude allows us to see a lot of things.

If we practice it in the right way, where we're amazing, where we may fall short. I think gratitude, this is a really interesting thing that I've learned about gratitude, I think people think of gratitude as like "These are all the things I'm good at, and these are all the things I have, and these are all the amazing things in my life, and these are all the reasons why I should be grateful," all these things that we've taught ourselves about gratitude.

But one of the thing I'm finding in my life, as I learn to practice gratitude more, is being grateful for the hard things, being grateful for the mistakes, being grateful for the failures, being grateful for people who have come into our lives that may have heard us, but they taught us incredible lessons about what we do and don't like, what we don't want to have happen to other people in our lives, what we don't want to do to other people.

And so, I think we have to be careful too with gratitude to not get stuck in this mindset of gratitude is all happiness and positivity, and rainbows and butterflies. I'm learning more and more that I'm most grateful for some of the hardest things in my life, even more so than the roof over my head, or the incredible skillset I gained in business, which allows me to provide for my life.

Those are all amazing things I love, but I'm actually more grateful for the hardest days, that I made it through and I learned lessons. I'm more grateful for the people who maybe hurt me deeply, but I'm like I get it now. I see why that happened, why certain things happen to us, and finding gratitude in all things in our life. I actually think all of these benefits they talk about come even more so when we can find ourselves grateful for the good and the bad, which all serves a purpose in our life.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** I think you hit the nail on the head there. I mean it's so easy to fall into the "poor me" attitude, or "This happened to me," "This happened to me," all of these different things that happen to me, that all these people did to me, as opposed to looking at "Well, what have I learned from this because that happened?"

What do you learn from that morning waking up depressed and not wanting to do life that day, and having to get up and do it? Well, what if you look back in the afternoon and feel grateful for the fact that you got your butt out of bed, right?

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Yep.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** And you found a way to do it. And how did you find that way? And be grateful. And I think that's a big part of it, too, is it's not just being grateful for other people and be more compassionate towards them, but being grateful for ourselves and being more compassionate towards ourselves.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Sure.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** We are not compassionate towards ourselves most of the time.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Yeah.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** And that negative talk and all of that. So, yeah, I just I think it's—I think it's such a great point that you talk about, to look at the—the good things and the bad, and what are the lessons that were learned?

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Absolutely. I used to get really frustrated when I'd see people who were happy all the time, like "How are you happy all the time?" and "Why are you so bubbly and happy all the time?" and "How do you just look at everything like it's so positive?"

But a lot of those people in my life, who I've come to know and understand them more, and as I've been through my own process of struggle and suffering and overcoming hard things, I realize that a lot of those people are actually people who feel negative emotions and positive emotions, they have good days and bad days like everyone else, but they've learned, through being refined through really hard trials, like it's okay, like this is happening right now, but it doesn't define me or my day.

And I'm going to figure out a way around it. I've found that all those people who are so happy and so positive and so great all the time, if you ask them, like "Do you feel happy all the time?" They'll

tell you no. But you see those people walking through life with a good attitude because they've learned, like "Come what may today, I'm going to fact this day, and I'm going to make it through, and it's okay, and things are going to happen, but it's going to be okay."

And I think that's the other thing about gratitude, when we practice gratitude more in our life, both in the things that have been hard and the things that are good, we realize that things are going to be okay and they worked out the way they're supposed to work out. And those people who, I used to be so frustrated, like "Why are you happy all the time?"

I think those are some of the people in life who have learned that lesson and realized that gratitude is what carries them through every day, just having a happy heart and happy attitude. They're make it through. So, just an interesting perspective that I've learned going through life. So, just to close this out, gratitude can be one of the keys to wellbeing.

So, Arthur C. Brooks, author of *Gross National Happiness* and a column in the New York Times, said "Building the best life does not require fealty to feelings in the name of authenticity, but rather, rebelling against negative impulses and acting right even when we don't feel like it, kind of going back on what I said.

And I want to make this clear. Again, it's not that we don't feel our feelings. I think feelings are so important. But we realize that we have to keep moving forward and we realize that we need to find the beauty in all things and that we can't stop, we have to keep moving. I think it's so important. And I think it also says "Acting grateful can actually make you feel grateful." So, I think we can will within ourselves certain emotions and certain feelings, and it takes us—it takes a strong person to do that, but we can create that habit in our lives.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** I think it's a little bit of "Fake it 'till you make it" if you need to. I mean sometimes, you're in just such a crappy place mentally and emotionally that it's not easy to necessarily go into the grateful state. And so, just acting grateful, starting together, will just kind of get your body more in that state, get your mind there.

You know what's interesting? And it's like you said, we're not trying to say that emotions aren't good or don't feel the emotions, the negative emotions, or anything like that, but what is interesting is, our mind plays such a big part in that. We start going a little bit down a rabbit hole and we start making assumptions, and now we start feeling these negative feelings based on these assumptions that we don't even know are true, and it just compounds and it goes down that.

And that's where I really think that it's not that those feelings you have aren't real, but that's where you can stop and "Let me just get centered for a second. Let me think about the things

that I'm grateful for. Let me have some gratitude towards this situation, or towards this person that I've made up all these assumptions about, or towards this situation I've made all these assumptions about."

And that will change your mindset from going so far down this rabbit hole of making up all of this stuff that never even happened, it's all just happening in your head and you're feeling the feelings from it. It can stop that and send you in the other path. Now, hey, at least make some positive assumptions, make some good assumptions, make some things that's going to lift you up and just—it's just a total 180.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Absolutely. Yeah, so to close this out today, back to the wellbeing and some of these—the final pieces of information that they delivered after doing this research, and a lot of the research that's been done, research showed that the gratitude focus participants exhibited increased wellbeing and concluded that a conscious focus on blessings may have emotional and interpersonal benefits.

Understand this. The participants didn't begin the study any more grateful or ungrateful than anyone else, and they didn't change their lives during the study so that they'd have more to be thankful for. They simply turned their outlook to one of gratitude, and they found that they were happier for it. So, to close this out today, for me, it's just a matter of what can you do each day to feel a little bit more gratitude, and how can you practice it in a way that's meaningful for you?

I've found my way. What does that look like for you? Some people write gratitude. Sometimes, people say it out loud. Sometimes they share appreciation texts with people during the day and that's their gratitude. However, it works for you, I think a little more gratitude in your life goes a long way.

**Jonathan Hunsaker:** Yeah, and especially as the holidays come up, and it gets harder and we're missing loved ones that may not be with us anymore, or we're with loved ones that we don't want to be around right now, or whatever it is, use the gratitude to help get you through there, use the gratitude to find the good in it, to find the lessons, to find the blessings, to find all of that.

And I think that it will make the holiday season that much more enjoyable, and not just the holiday season, it will change your life forever. And it just starts with a little bit, just starts with right now. Stop this podcast and get present to some of the things you're grateful for in life, and then do it again later today, and then do it again tomorrow morning, and then do it again the next night, and just watch how your entire life will change by being that much more grateful.

**TeriAnn Trevenen:** Absolutely.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Excellent. Thank you, everybody, for tuning in. Hopefully, you got some good value from this podcast. We have many more coming for you. And if you want to check any of the show notes, you can go to [EmpoweringYouOrganically.com](http://EmpoweringYouOrganically.com). We have all the show notes, we have all the references to the books, to the studies, to everything that we've talked about here. You can go check it out, the Anthony Robbins, Tony Robbins method, his seven-minute method for gratitude. I think we'll have a link to his YouTube video. So, we'll have all of that stuff there for you.

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* You call him Anthony Robbins because you've been in this game so long, that before he was Tony Robbins, he was Anthony Robbins.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* I know.

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* And that just shows you how long he's been in the marketing industry. It cracks me up.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Yeah, it goes way back. So, thanks for showing my age. So, yes, and I think about him as Anthony Robbins. Anyway...

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* Aren't you so grateful for your age?

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* I am so grateful for my age, and I'm so grateful for you to point out my age, so thank you for that.

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* You're welcome.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Listen, I hope you guys get some value from these podcasts. If you do, make sure that you like us, subscribe on iTunes so you don't miss any of them. When you subscribe on iTunes, it helps us show up in other people's feeds more, they recommend this podcast to other listeners that may like it, and the more people we can reach, maybe we can have more people be grateful for the things in their life, that will make them have a better, happier life. So, thank you, everybody, for listening. TeriAnn, any last words?

*TeriAnn Trevenen:* That's it for me today. Thanks, everyone.

*Jonathan Hunsaker:* Thanks, everyone.

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**Episode 165 - The Science Behind Gratitude**