

## Spotlighting Remarkable Efforts and Expressing Appreciation

### Achieving Social Closeness and Connectedness While Physically Distant

#### **The Appreciation Journal**

While this pandemic has created such broad-based adversity for everyone, it has also created the opportunity for some extraordinary work, magnanimous gestures, and incredible ingenuity. It's easy to become preoccupied with what is not working, what you can't do, how you can't meet expectations for reaching and educating the students. But if you just stop for a moment to consider your own efforts and the efforts of so many others in your circle, it is truly incredible what people are doing to help, and how quickly they have mobilized, even as their lives have been turned upside down. This pandemic will generate a new class of heroes and everyone has a chance to be part of it, regardless of the size or significance of their contribution.

We are people who help each other, support each other, listen to each other, and guide each other. We are patient, sensitive and understanding, kind, creative, determined and resourceful. We work hard, we work smart and we work together. We should strive to see the best and bring out the best in each other and we should routinely show our appreciation for each other.

It is important for our emotional well-being that we set up a mechanism that connects us to our collective compassion and creativity. "Social Distancing" is the primary strategy for limiting infection, but what we really want to achieve is social closeness and social connectedness while we are physically distant.

When we connect with our collective compassion we engage the parasympathetic nervous system. This is the part of the nervous system that settles the brain, calms the body, resets the stress response system and restores homeostasis. By witnessing acts of generosity, unexpected kindness, compassion, understanding, or other exemplary displays of consideration toward others, we interrupt the stress response.

With people living and working in relative isolation, it is important to stay connected with your team, with the good that your team is producing. Connection with your team is a meaningful form of social support through work, and that is a significant factor in maintaining resilience, especially if you are seeing the best and bringing out the best in others, if you're searching for strengths and building on what is good.

Just as it is outlined in Module V for families, (<https://kevinplummerphd.com/?s=corona+virus>) we can create ways to share what we appreciate, share what we want to recognize in others.

What do you find remarkable?

What do you feel grateful for?

What impresses you?  
What is heartwarming?  
What are you thankful for?  
What do you find amazing?  
Who or what do you appreciate?

At the same time that you are resetting your stress response, building your connection with your team, and finding inspiration, you are also documenting and creating a more lasting narrative that will be important to reflect on and learn from after this crisis passes.

Perhaps a Google Doc could be created that would allow your staff to spotlight an effort or express appreciation. Think about the prompt that you would need to shape these responses (see previous paragraph) and consider whether entries should start with the person's first name (I would recommend this). Also, consider a way to make this a routine (because it is not necessarily our habit to look for the good). Maybe part of ending the work day should be a check-in with the appreciation journal. In addition, once per week an email prompt could be sent to remind everyone to take some time to connect with what they appreciate. It takes a while for a routine to become a habit, but eventually that's what you want. The more time people spend reflecting on the "good" the more their brains will get better at finding it, and with this enhanced neurological circuitry, people will find much more "good" that has been there all along, just previously unrecognized.