

Kari Robideau:

Hello and thank you for tuning in to the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development podcast series. My name is Kari Robideau and I am a Youth Development Extension Educator and this is our third season with the podcast. We start the season with a podcast to remind us to take time to be grateful and to show gratitude towards others, especially when we find ourselves in those leadership roles. To discuss this topic, we have Nancy Hegland, Program Leader in the Center for Youth Development joining us today. Thank you for joining me, Nancy.

Nancy Hegland:

Oh, you're certainly welcome. I'm really excited to do a podcast. It is the first one that I've been able to do and I'm really excited to share the information and the research I've done regarding being a grateful leader.

Kari Robideau:

Thank you Nancy, and thank you for joining us for your first podcast. Let's start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and your role in the Center for Youth Development, and I think specifically to how you work with our staff to develop strong leadership skills.

Nancy Hegland:

Certainly. You're correct, I serve as the Program Leader in Youth Development and this is a role that I've had for 15 years and I currently work with extension educators and program coordinators in the Southern part of the state. So working with educators as they work within their functions as well as program coordinators that are working in our local counties and delivering programs that are working most closely with volunteers. One of the things about my role that I also really like is the opportunity that I have to provide leadership to staff in professional development. And with that role, I have the opportunity to work with many colleagues to see what are the staff needs, where is it that we need additional training, how can we ensure that training is meeting the needs that people have at different stages in their career.

Nancy Hegland:

And so most recently I've had the opportunity to redo our onboarding process, which is really a fun way to look at when an employee starts in their role and how we support them to learn what they need as they need to know it, not to get everything at one time. And why it's really important for me to work with our colleagues because I love seeing... I love the growth. So I love growth in the 4-H Youth Development Program, whether it be with youth or volunteers, but I love when I see my program colleagues being able to grow and develop in their role as a professional. I just see that as really exciting and the opportunity to dig into some learning and then apply it in the laboratory of learning that we have with the youth development program.

Kari Robideau:

And you mentioned that laboratory of learning, which is our 4-H Youth Development Program and for some people listening today I think, what you're sharing with us today is absolutely applicable to all people who work in youth development programs because we do need to increase our skills. There is a really big learning curve, I think, no matter where you're at in your professional career. But sometimes we don't stop and take time to be grateful and to have gratitude for the people who work with us and

sometimes those who we supervise or have some kind of leadership over, whether that's a volunteer or another staff person.

Nancy Hegland:

Right. That is most certainly correct. Many times we get going and we have a task list and we want to check the boxes and I love to check the boxes, but I also know it's important to step back and think about how we really show our appreciation and be thankful and grateful for the others that we're working with and the things that they're doing to support the programming that we're doing. And certainly this is applicable, I think to not only youth development professionals, but anyone working with others.

Kari Robideau:

True. Well, let's jump right in. You have five strategies for us today that will help improve our attitudes and behaviors about gratitude. So let's start maybe with you giving us a background on this topic and how it became important to you.

Nancy Hegland:

Thanks. One of the things this past fall, I had the need to ask others to pick up some work that wasn't really on their plate. And so I had to ask them like, "Would you take on this role? Would you do this?" And everyone that I asked said yes. And no one complained. They may have been like, "Oh really? She's asking me again?" But no one said no and every single person said they would pick up more work. And I was so grateful for their willingness, and I'm hopeful that I expressed that at the time that they were taking on that additional role. But also that I continue to express the appreciation gratitude I have for them as a colleague.

Nancy Hegland:

And I also know that we get busy in our work and any type of role you get certain times that are busier but that we do need to take that time and appreciate what people are doing. And a couple of other things that really peaked my interest was that I was able to read an article for motivational speaker Jones Laughlin, and he really shared some strategies that you could improve your attitude and behaviors of gratitude all year long. So sometimes we think about the certain times of year like, "Oh yes, I'll do my appreciation." Whether it's volunteer appreciation week or employee recognition, or Thanksgiving. There's different times when we tend to make an effort.

Nancy Hegland:

However, it really needs to become part of our daily practice. Another resource that I've been able to utilize is the five languages of appreciation in the workplace. And that's a book written by Gary Chapman and Paul White, and I have found it to be really insightful and there are a lot of aspects that I think are important for people to consider when they're thinking about showing appreciation and gratitude for and with colleagues that they're working with.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah, I appreciate your point of I think we're good at showing gratitude and thinking about what we're grateful for at certain times and for certain events. As I was thinking about how we would start off our third season in this podcast series, I am thankful that you are willing to share these strategies with us so

that we can start our year off strong. Let's jump to number one then. The first one you suggest is schedule gratitude time. Tell us about that.

Nancy Hegland:

Yes. Taking that time and scheduling gratitude time. There's places on my calendar I should... I need to, I haven't perfected this one yet, but to write in gratitude time. I have a colleague that every other week writes down that they're going to send a note, an appreciation note to someone. And that's a handwritten note that they send out to a colleague. And so taking the time to put it on your calendars. Scheduling. gratitude time is just as important as most meetings that we have. But just like anything new, it takes practice. And it can be small, just investing five minutes.

Nancy Hegland:

Maybe you decide that every morning you're going to start with a gratitude list from the previous day. And you could do something in drawings, you can write words, but however you do it, it can really help you start a new day. It can help you think about what you're grateful for and the people that you are grateful for. I think it's not only what you're grateful for but what you appreciate in others. I think that's a huge piece that is important to consider, and then thinking about how we express that gratitude.

Kari Robideau:

I really liked this point, the intentionality behind being grateful, and that we run and run and run and things seem so busy. I love that idea of putting it on your calendar.

Nancy Hegland:

Yeah, I think it's important because otherwise it tends to like other things not be on our radar and a week or two has gone by and we haven't taken that time for reflection. And reflection is a huge part of really a practice as a youth development professional. So taking that time and considering what it is that you're really appreciative and then take that next step in expressing that to others I think is really important as well.

Kari Robideau:

And I like the idea of the gratitude journal for yourself, but then also letting other people know what you're grateful for. And you mentioned a handwritten note, but what do you think about a quick text or an email?

Nancy Hegland:

Yeah, I think that actually jumps right into the next tip that I have. So speak gratitude language. And so once gratitude time becomes a habit of yours, it's also important to choose how you express gratitude. And I certainly think that a text, I think, a quick email are really, really appropriate. And most of the time the receiver's going to appreciate that. However, I've learned in reading the book, *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, that it can really vary. And that's somewhat of the challenge with expressing gratitude is that the way that I might want to receive praise and recognition may not be the way that Carrie that you like to receive it.

Nancy Hegland:

And so Chapman and White in their book really cite five ways that we like to be appreciated. And so one of them is words of affirmation. So that's hearing the words, and that can be a text, it can be an email, a handwritten note. It was interesting in the book because they really talked about one person said, "What's really important to me is that I get those words of affirmation and I like the emails and I like that. But what really means a lot, is when someone writes me a handwritten note."

Nancy Hegland:

But it was really interesting though because it said younger professionals may not think that that's the type of appreciation. They may be happier that you recognize them in a different way, that you send a text, that you put something on Twitter. So one of the key things is to have that conversation with people that you're working with to find out what is their preferred way that they want to be appreciated. So words of affirmation is one of them. A quality time. Just having that quality time, whether it's a conversation with your colleague that may be more than anything that they want. They might not care about the words but...

Nancy Hegland:

The other thing is acts of service, is another type that they cite. Tangible gifts. A lot of people like to get a gift. One of the things that we've done recently is to recognize people for their years of service. And so we asked them to come up front at a conference and receive a gift. And that may be really, really great for some and not for others. However, you have to make a decision, what do you think is going to work the best for the majority? And so it can be a challenge.

Nancy Hegland:

And the last one they talk about is physical touch. And so certainly some people I know they just appreciate a hand, a pat on the back or a hug. But I also think you have to be a little cautious with that one because some people aren't individuals that appreciate getting hugs. And so that's why it's so important to know and speak the gratitude language that really aligns with their gratitude language. So Carrie, when you think about that, is there one of those ways of gratitude that you like to be appreciated in the most?

Kari Robideau:

It was interesting listening to you describe them because the words of affirmation, being acknowledged absolutely makes me feel good and makes me feel like the other person is grateful for what I did, what I completed, maybe what I developed. But then as you were talking about going up in front of the group and being acknowledged and having a big to-do about that in front of a large group of people, not as much of what I need. And that just reminded me of you. I think we give gratitude in ways that we want it. Does that make sense? And that there are absolutely people who need it in every way, and that can be a challenge.

Nancy Hegland:

It can be. I have a couple of colleagues that one doesn't need that public recognition. They're happy if they get the job done. And then when they're working with someone that really thrives on public recognition awards and things like that, that can be a bit of a challenge. So trying to meet halfway in the middle, because we're never probably going to be completely as high maybe in one area as the other

person. But it's really important to think about how you might be able to meet in the middle and stretch yourself a little bit to align more with that person's preferred method of gratitude.

Nancy Hegland:

One of the other pieces I just want to mention that I think is so important is that when you are looking at words of affirmation that you be specific. So they really cited the fact that being very specific for what the individual did or how they did it rather than saying, "Great job guys." Yeah, it's great to hear "Great job. You did well." But when someone can be really specific, like, "I really appreciated when you did this particular piece and it made a difference because." So thinking about something that someone did and how you can really lay that out because the more specific you can be with words of affirmation, really the more it'll be received as that you are truly grateful. When you just say, "Great job." You could be saying that to you know a lot of people a lot of times. So when you're very specific, I think that just really adds more meaning to the message that you're sending.

Kari Robideau:

That gratitude language then is important for us to consider with a group of people, a team perhaps that we work with, as well as that one-on-one. And it sounds like being intentional about these aspects and when I'm working specifically with you, Nancy, learning how you like me to show that I'm grateful for what you did or to acknowledge something that you completed or that you are proud of, but then in a team setting, broaden how we're recognizing people. And almost that menu of gratitude that you make sure you're doing it in a lot of different ways, not just in your preferred.

Nancy Hegland:

Right. That is very, very accurate. That trying to make it broader and maybe different types of recognition as you're working with a larger group of people.

Kari Robideau:

Now the third strategy that you have is to listen.

Nancy Hegland:

Yes. Listening. Now that is... Well, it's not necessarily a tricky one, but do people really listen to what people are saying? Because we're busy and so a lot of times we might have a lot of things going on. So are we really hearing what the individual is trying to say to us? So many times there's so much going on and there's multiple tasks that are on our radar that we really have to take that time and focus on the individual. As we've got multiple screens maybe in front of us, sometimes it's really easy to have a lot going on, and when you're talking to someone to pop something else up. Well, are you really listening then?

Nancy Hegland:

And so one way to really show your gratitude is to listen. And don't do more than one task at a time. I used to pride myself, "Oh I'm a multitasker. I can get a lot done." But was I really always listening to what people were saying? And so I've really tried to not do that anymore because I want to hear what the individuals are saying and really focus on what's most important right then. Because if we're not listening, we may not hear the message as it was intended to be set. I also think it's really important to listen with our head and our heart. So we have thinkers and we have feelers and sometimes individuals that are more of a thinking mode because they're a doer and they want to get this done and their

feeling side is important, but it's not as high. That they may miss some of the things from the heart. And I think that as a leader it's really, really critical that you pay attention to both the head and the heart. It's just essential, I think.

Nancy Hegland:

When I think about it that we have to listen for both aspects and hear where people are coming from when we're listening and talking with others.

Kari Robideau:

It's a good reminder in professional settings that we still need to listen with our heart as well as our head.

Nancy Hegland:

Right. I totally agree with that one, that we have to be able to keep that on the forefront as well.

Kari Robideau:

Well your fourth strategy relates to accepting gratitude. Now, so far we've talked about giving it out, but how about when it's coming towards us? Tell us about accepting gratitude from your team.

Nancy Hegland:

Oh yes. And this can be a difficult one because if we're not used to hearing it or, "Oh I didn't do anything. It's no big deal." So it can be really difficult to accept gratitude from others. But once again, it's so important to listen and to say thank you. Because people take time to show their appreciation and so they want to feel like it is valued. You really need to take that time and accept gratitude from your team, and that could be your work team. It could be... I mean this actually applies to your friends. It applies in more situations than just your professional life. But it can be your volunteer roles. So being able to accept gratitude and appreciate what people are saying to you and not say, "Oh, it was no big deal. No big deal."

Nancy Hegland:

So just saying thank you because when you say, "It's no big deal." Then you kind of diminish the contribution that you gave and so it was valued. It was appreciated. So saying thank you and even saying, "Well if you have another opportunity, I'd love to do that again." Because maybe there's another piece that you can do. Or asking people when they do say thank you or show their appreciation, then just adding a little bit more to it and asking them a few more questions about it, because then you start a conversation when you're accepting that gratitude and learn more about future things that you may be working with them on.

Kari Robideau:

What you're saying is just like we need to give gratitude in multiple ways and maybe sometimes in ways that aren't as comfortable to us, we need to accept that gratitude even if it's not in a way that's maybe my preferred or totally comfortable to me, accept it.

Nancy Hegland:

That's right. That's right. And I know we all have our different styles and people tend to know, they tend to know what those are about you if they know you well and they work closely with you. But their preferred style might be something different. So it is accepting what they're offering. I think that's the other thing too, is that it might not be your preferred, but it is what really is comfortable to them and it's important to them. And so I think that's the other piece that's critical, is that if it's important to them, then it too should be important to you as the receiver and accepting that gratitude.

Kari Robideau:

Gratitude is a two-way street.

Nancy Hegland:

It certainly is. Yeah.

Kari Robideau:

Well your fifth strategy is ask, "How can I help?" I bet that's related to what we've discussed so far.

Nancy Hegland:

Yeah. Many people ask, "How can I help you? What do you need?" But do they always follow through? You know, I think that's the... "Oh, what can I do to help you?" But by asking, "How can I help?" You're asking them what they need and you're more likely to hear what others need. So rather than, "Can I help you?" "How can I help you?" So just changing that up a little bit. Generally when I have conversations with the educators that I work most closely with, I say, "What's one thing that I'm doing that's really helping you, and what's one thing I can do better?" I also want to add, "How can I help you?" Which I have done recently to add that into my conversation because knowing that you're available, to me that's really important to me. I really appreciate that as like, "How can I help you when I'm working with others?"

Nancy Hegland:

And then the one thing that Jones Laughlin really said though is that you need to really mean it if you ask, "How can I help?" And that's really, I would say, the most critical piece because a lot of people can say, "Oh, can I help you?" Or, "How can I help you?" And that may be an empty message, and that's not the message you want to send. You want to send a message of, "How can I help?" And then be ready to follow up with what the person has asked. How can I help? And then you might not be able to do everything and that's fine, but be prepared that they're going to come back and say, "Well, I could really use some help here and here, here. Let's develop a plan and see how we can make that happen."

Nancy Hegland:

Rather than saying, "Oh, okay, sounds good." And then it's a week or two or a month and you've not done anything about it. So asking, "How can I help?" Is really another way to show gratitude when you're working with others.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah. It sounds like this one is really taking gratitude another step further and seeing that someone needs something from you, or needs help, or is overwhelmed and that they will be grateful. And you're showing to them that you're grateful to them because I know you need help right now, what can I do?

Nancy Hegland:

Right.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah, I like that.

Nancy Hegland:

Yep. I think that's right on, is that it goes back to the other aspects that we've talked about earlier, but it really puts some action in there about how can I help you and then committing to it and making it happen or finding a way. It might not even be you that can do everything, but maybe you have some resources that you can share. Maybe you know someone else that's really good with... I think that's the other piece to remember by saying, "How can I help?" It might not be that you can do everything the person is asking for, but maybe it's just problem solving or thinking through the strategy of how you can make that happen down the road.

Kari Robideau:

And if we do all of these strategies, becoming more grateful, showing others that we're grateful and being better at accepting when someone tells us that they're grateful for us, what will happen?

Nancy Hegland:

Well, I think one of the really big things... two things that I think about Carrie, and one of them is that you develop a stronger relationship with others. So you're more comfortable working with each other, you understand each other, and that you'll be more likely, I would say, to go that extra effort. So like when I mentioned earlier in the podcast when I asked people, "Could you pick this up?" And everyone said yes. I hope that we built that relationship that they were comfortable saying yes and that they knew that it would be appreciated.

Nancy Hegland:

I think the other thing that is really critical is that it does improve employee engagement. And that's an area that I am really focused on and I think is really important. So we had in Center for Youth Development, many colleagues throughout the state and in different work environments. So sometimes employee engagement can be a little bit challenging because one, there's different work settings and two, there's different ways that people want to be engaged and want to be appreciated. And so if we really focus on appreciation and gratitude, I think that will really make a strong effort in improving employee engagement.

Nancy Hegland:

And we know that nationwide employee engagement isn't as high as we'd like it. We've done employee engagement surveys within the University of Minnesota, we've seen some of those numbers. And so really trying to focus on how can we improve employee engagement at the most local level or the most

relevant level. And that's one thing that I really strive to do as a youth development professional, is look at that level where employee engagement can be most influential and most acknowledged, I would say.

Kari Robideau:

Well Nancy, what a perfect topic for us to start our third season of the podcast out with, of being appreciative and grateful to those we work with. And I do appreciate the ideas and examples of how we can give and accept gratitude that you gave us today. And that really there's strategies that we can use year round, so thank you for being a part of the podcast today.

Nancy Hegland:

Thank you so much for asking. I really had a great time visiting with you and sharing more about living as a grateful leader.

Kari Robideau:

And as we bring this podcast to a close, I invite all of you to visit our website at www.extension.umn.edu/youth. There you will learn more information about training, education, tools for youth workers and leaders including research-based articles written by our colleagues. And also make sure you check out our Minnesota 4-H program and learn how you can get involved if you aren't already.

Kari Robideau:

Also read and comment on our youth development insight blog. Nancy wrote a blog on this topic and it is called Living as a Grateful Leader. I know she would enjoy engaging in conversation with you so please leave a comment and she will leave a comment back and she would be grateful to start that conversation I'm sure.

Kari Robideau:

That is going to wrap up the first of our podcast in this third season. My name is Kari Robideau, joined today by Nancy Hegland from the University of Minnesota Extension, Center for Youth Development. Please tune in again soon.