



ROAD SIGNS FOR SUCCESS[®]

Your Weekly Guide on the Road to Maximizing Your Potential • January 2, 2008

By Sondra Whitt

One of the things I enjoy most about the holidays is getting to spend time with people that I don't often see. At a holiday get-together I over-heard a conversation between a couple of people in which one stated that he would like to know what it was like to be content. At first, I was surprised by his statement. He is a comfortably retired executive, has a nice family, excels in his hobby of making beautiful woodcrafts and furniture, is getting ready to build a new home and seems to have all his needs and most of his wants met. Yet he isn't content.

That same evening I spoke with someone who, in response to my question of whether or not he enjoyed his work, told me that sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't. To which I replied, "That's normal." Then, after he asked me what Jim and I did in our business I told him that we work to transform lives, leaders, and organizations through the power of purpose. "Do you help wretches?" he asked. "Yes, we do," I replied, while thinking *how sad*. He has a beautiful young family, enjoys outdoor sports, always has a smile on his face, is a loving person, and appears to be happy. Yet he smilingly describes himself as a "wretch."

There are two reasons I think both of these people are discontent. First, they obviously have no sense of purpose or meaning in their lives. They may not even consider the possibility that they *have* a purpose in life or they may be like others we know who believe people have a purpose but simply don't want to make the effort to find it. The second reason for their lack of contentment, I believe, is a matter of gratitude. I know both of them would improve their contentment and happiness just by choosing to be more grateful for what they *do* have.

Gratitude is defined as "the quality or condition of being thankful; the appreciation of an inclination to return kindness." Gratitude not only makes us *feel* good, it's also motivating — when we feel grateful, we want to share the goodness we're enjoying with others. In his research on gratitude, Dr. Robert Emmons found "scientific proof that when people regularly engage in the systematic cultivation of gratitude, they experience a variety of measurable benefits: psychological, physical, and interpersonal." He also found that, in some cases, gratitude "led to transformative life changes" and "gratitude practices can increase the set range of happiness by up to 25 percent." This requires "thoughtful consideration" or, as he puts it, "I recognize, intellectually; I acknowledge, willingly; and I appreciate, emotionally. Only when all three come together is gratitude complete." When we recognize that we have something for which to be grateful, we look at it differently, we think about it in a new way. Then we can even see positive in a negative. Even when things don't go the way we want them to, we can usually find some good that has come from the bad, we can find something for which to be grateful.

As I look back over 2007, there are many things I'm grateful for and others that will require me to think about them in a new way. Daily, there are both large and small ways to be grateful if I consciously look for them — in the good, as well as the so-called bad. I'm looking forward to *deliberately* cultivating an even greater attitude of gratefulness in 2008. And I think I'll use one suggested way of cultivating gratitude, which is by keeping a "gratitude journal" and recording in it — daily, weekly, or twice weekly — things for which I'm grateful.