

## Gratitude-based group intervention manual for college student-athletes

Datu, Jesus Alfonso ✉

*Counseling and Educational Psychology Department, De La Salle University-Manila, Philippines*  
([jess.datu@yahoo.com](mailto:jess.datu@yahoo.com))



ISSN: 2243-7681  
Online ISSN: 2243-769X

**Received:** 3 January 2013  
**Available Online:** 10 April 2013

**Revised:** 5 January 2013  
**DOI:** 10.5861/ijrsp.2013.294

**Accepted:** 15 February 2013

OPEN ACCESS

### ***Abstract***

The current manual is designed to offer a guide in facilitating a group intervention based on the conceptual and theoretical premises of gratitude. Before the implementation of the proposed group intervention, prospective members will be evaluated through administering Gratitude Six-Item Form (GQ6) and an interview with the group counselor. There are five sessions which will be executed on a weekly basis. Activities are made to increase the members' positive realization of themselves, others, and events in their lives. Each session will be tracked through group intervention case notes to ensure that important events and processes are noted. At the end of group intervention, members will be assessed using group feedback, accumulated case notes and Gratitude Six-Item Form to look at the impact of the gratitude-based intervention in leading college student athletes towards a more positive and appreciative worldview.

***Keywords:*** gratitude; group intervention manual; positive psychology; student-athletes

## **Gratitude-based group intervention manual for college student-athletes**

### **1. Purpose**

The aim of the group is to optimize accessibility of individuals towards greater inclination to appreciate the value of life. The final objective of the group is to increase the members' psychological well-being through providing them with opportunities to express thanks for the tangible and intangible things they receive not only from the athletic but also with other endeavors they engaged in.

### **2. Conceptual framework**

With the myriad of things, events and circumstances that individuals have to be thankful of, there is no doubt that gratitude is one of the emotions crucial in the pursuit towards a life full of appreciation and happiness. As an emotion, gratitude was defined as a way to value positive contributions of other people and life's circumstances (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Gratitude can be conceptualized as "part of wider life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive" (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010, p. 892). That being said, it is apparent how gratefulness accounts for the attainment of positive emotions like happiness. To support this claim, Emmons and McCullough (2003) demarcated on individuals' inclination to count blessings as a way to enhance gratitude that is predictive of subjective well-being.

A good number of studies identified several predictors of gratitude which includes self-esteem (Bernstein & Simons, 1974), positive affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009), and life satisfaction (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). From such findings, it can be assumed that gratitude is not just a mere interpersonally-derived construct but a character that may be intrinsically-motivated. These conceptual and empirical assertions were suggestive of the pluralistic nature of gratitude as a positively-valence psychological entity. More importantly, several empirical studies factored in on the potential benefits of gratitude in social and psychological health as a result of its link on dispositional traits (Emmons & Mishira, 2011; Hill, Allemand, & Roberts, 2013).

The recognized physical and psychological benefits of gratifying experiences extended the line of investigative inquiries to promote interventions that would alleviate negative symptoms of individuals. Specific concerns addressed by gratitude-based interventions from past researches involved increasing physical health and well being among patients with neuromuscular diseases (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), improving sleep quality among subjects (Digdon & Koble, 2011), and enhancing romantic relationships (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). These practical and experimental based treatment evidences further strengthened the hypothesis that interventions crafted from the conceptual and empirical premises of gratitude among wide array of clinical and normal populations. To augment its therapeutic worth in the delivery of psychological interventions, Bono and McCullough (2006) conceptually integrated gratitude in the paradigm of cognitive psychotherapy to evoke positive responses to beneficial circumstances. Implications of bringing in gratitude along with forgiveness in the course of modifying dysfunctional thinking patterns sensitive to various issues were elaborated as well.

As opposed to the thrusts to reduce symptoms, there were experimental studies devised to enhance well-being of individuals. The influence of positive psychology in the construction of these specific interventions is very significant which zeroed in on optimizing character strengths more than alleviating symptoms. Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) tested the efficacy of positive psychological interventions in increasing happiness and reducing depression levels of the subjects through online intervention strategies. The gratitude visit exercise yielded the largest effect size in enhancing happiness indices of the subjects during the first month

of the study. Given that, it can be surmised that gratitude-based interventions are very potent not just in symptom reduction but also in happiness augmentation, an empirically-supported claim validated by the results of past researches (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2006).

From such theoretical, empirical and conceptual standpoints, the promise of gratitude-based interventions in perpetuating psychological wellness among individuals is very evident. Yet, most of the time, intervention strategies crafted in the past were not contextualized in the distinct milieu of the target populace. That said, the intention of the current group intervention manual is to lead college students toward desirable and positive outcomes which is one of the core ends of counseling. In particular, student-athletes are the intended population for the intervention as they are more vulnerable to experience adjustment and wellness issues in the course of balancing the life of being a student and an athlete. Formulation of the manual is very crucial as it endeavors to standardize procedures in the delivery of a gratitude-based group intervention. As articulated awhile ago, the final aim of this manualized intervention is to enhance psychological well-being of this population which may possibly increase susceptibility to greater happiness and satisfaction in life despite the presence of well-recognizable impediments in life.

### **3. Group goals**

The objective of the intervention is to enhance well-being of college student-athletes through an intervention that promotes appreciation of things in life. The activities are aimed at optimizing opportunities for the members to show and express gratitude for the things they have received whether they are tangible (e.g. money, gadgets, grades, etc.) or intangible things (e.g. love, wisdom, happiness). Specifically, the following goals are expected to be met at the end of the process:

- a. To become aware of the influence of gratitude in the attainment of positive emotions
- b. To express greater appreciation towards one's self, other people and situations and events
- c. To nurture one's inclination to gratifying experiences

#### *3.1 Pre-group screening and orientation*

The group accommodates 6-10 members. It will be comprised of five sessions, with approximately one and a half hour per session on a weekly basis. Given that the group's primary goal is to enhance their appreciation towards their selves, others and situations, two procedures will be utilized to identify the levels of their gratitude inclinations. Firstly, Gratitude Questionnaire Six-Item Form (GQ6), a 6-item inventory that purports to measure their levels of gratitude will be administered. Then, an interview by the group facilitator will be done to check if there is a good match between the profiles of the prospective members and the goals of the group. Incorporated in the interview is an examination of the counseling or psychiatric history and behavioral observations of the prospective members to recognize if they are diagnosed or currently experiencing serious psychological conditions (e.g. major depressive disorder, paranoid personality disorder, agoraphobia, etc.). This will help in assessing their possible inclusion or exclusion in the group. It must be noted that only adolescents who have been experiencing mild concerns will be taken in the group. Other criteria for inclusion would involve commitment and interests exhibited by the applicants. After passing the screening process, members will be given informed consent to apprise them about the nature, benefits and risks of joining the group. Aspiring members who may be presenting serious psychological issues will be referred to other qualified counselors or psychologists for appropriate interventions.

#### **4. Outline for five group sessions**

##### *4.1 Session 1*

###### Purpose

The objective for the first session is to maximize opportunities for each member to know one another in the group. They will be encouraged to share the circumstance or thoughts that have led them to join the group. The session is allotted as well for the group leader to discuss the things that the group can offer to its members, the responsibilities of each member and matters about confidentiality. Collaborative support will be encouraged from group members to ensure that a positive and conducive environment is established.

###### Theme

The first session's theme will zero in on how each member of the group describes their definition of gratitude. Most of the meanings would focus on getting tangible or materialistic entities or becoming successful on specific endeavors.

###### Activities

Firstly, introduction of the group facilitator and members will be done. The members will be encouraged to share the reasons that prompted them to join the group. The facilitator collates usual reasons that will be shared by the members concerning their definitions of gratitude. Based on the answers of the members, the facilitator comes up with a definition of gratitude stemming from the members' shared meaning and its conceptual definition. Then the main activity for every session will be introduced by the facilitator. Every session, a member will be assigned to share one story highlighting an experience in the past that let him/her feel thankful. Specific emotions and consequences of such accounts are encouraged to be discussed as well. To exemplify the process of sharing a story, the group facilitator will be the one who is going to do it. From this sharing, an interactive discussion will be executed by the facilitator. The facilitator, then, pulls out commonalities and differences among the elements that emerge from the interactive discussion. Definition of gratitude as stemmed from the members' unique experiential sharing will be conceptualized. After the processing, a group member will be assigned to share his gratifying experience next session. Necessary processes and events in the group are identified as well to guide the group in the succeeding sessions.

###### Process

The initial session of this group intervention sets an atmosphere as regards to the influence of gratitude on the way members look at things. Pulling out together commonalities and differences on the members' definition of gratitude aims at promoting an environment fostered by greater appreciation of insights shared by each member. This serves as the first step in learning the process of increasing gratitude.

##### *4.2 Session 2*

###### Purpose

The objective of the second session is to better understand the role of self-appreciation in the process of acquiring a greater realization towards gratifying experiences.

###### Theme

The theme of the second session is looking at how appreciation of one's self directly influences our inclination to more gratifying experiences and eventually joyous states. Appreciating one's knowledge, skills, abilities and relevant factors is one of the central themes in the session.

### Activities

The facilitator talks about what transpired during the initial session. Then he/she will let the assigned group member share his story concerning an experience that he/she was very thankful of. From the story, the facilitator initiates an interactive and collaborative discussion on the experience elicited by the group member. The facilitator then directs the discussion towards discovering personal resources that are central in the process of attaining a gratifying state based on the story. Skills, abilities, knowledge and other individual characteristics will be highlighted leading to the crystallization of gratifying feelings. Then, the facilitator pulls out together essential elements of one's self that emerged from the discussion in relation to gratifying experiences. Necessary processes and events in the group are identified as well to guide the group in the succeeding sessions.

### Process

The session primarily focuses on discovering aspects of self that are essential in understanding gratitude as an emotional experience. In the process, inculcating of greater appreciation towards one's self is reinforced through realizing personal resources that they have to be thankful of. More positive and constructive appraisals of members' strengths are promoted to enhance their accessibility towards greater self-appreciation and personal satisfaction

## 4.3 Session 3

### Purpose

The objective of the session is to lead the members towards appreciating the role of other people on their inclinations to gratifying emotional state.

### Theme

The theme for the third session is discovering the function of other people like family members, coaches, teammates, peers and colleagues in the crystallization of gratifying emotions.

### Activities

The session starts with the sharing from a group member concerning an experience that he or she is thankful of. From the sharing, the facilitator initiates an interactive discussion about the involvement of others in member's realization of the experience as a gratifying one. Citing the role of their immediate family members, friends, teammates, coaches among others will be encouraged as well. After the sharing, the facilitator will summarize common and distinct interpersonal elements that are salient in understanding the role of others in the attainment of a gratifying emotional state. Essential elements in the session will be carried over to the next session.

### Process

The activities utilized in the session further reinforce the positive aftermaths of gratitude in our daily lives. Social support and a feeling of belongingness are central in the interactive discussion. It aids the members in the process of realizing the role of others in their accomplishments instead of just focusing on one's personal resources as the sole source of success.

## 4.4 Session 4

### Purpose

The objective of the session is to foster an environment of increased appreciation towards specific situations

that may be relevant to one's accomplishment.

#### Theme

The theme for the session is to continuously sustain specific strategies on how to appreciate their lives. An important aspect of gratitude that will be talked about in the session zeroes in on the importance of appreciating situations or life events that may be directly or indirectly related to one's accomplishments.

#### Activities

The session commences through a recap of the things that transpired during the third session. The facilitator asks the assigned member to talk about his/her story which he was very thankful of. Then the facilitator initiates an interactive and collaborative discussion that focuses on the role of appreciating situations or experiences, they perceived to be predictive of their accomplishments. After the group sharing, central elements in the sessions will be discussed. As an assignment for the next session, members will be asked to select one quotation about gratitude that they preferred the most.

#### Process

The activities executed are consistent with the goals of the group intervention. In particular, the significance of appreciating situations and events in attaining a sense of personal satisfaction was highlighted. Through a dynamic group discussion, members learn from each other about specific strategies on how to better understand the importance of becoming grateful on situations to become happier in their lives.

### 4.5 Session 5

#### Purpose

The objective of fifth and final session is to do a culminating activity where the actions taken every session and learning insights are cited. Current levels of appreciation with life among the members will be evaluated sensitive to the group goals that were set.

#### Theme

The main theme for the last session is evaluating new insights and learning derived from group sessions. Highlighting positive changes, especially on the way they look at things that took place as a result of the group process is a major area in the interactive discussion.

#### Activity

The facilitator reviews the things that have taken place in the previous sessions. Then, each member will be asked to share the gratitude-related quotations that best represent the way they look at life resulting from the group process. From there, the facilitator summarizes essential themes and insights that came out of the sharing activities. Possible courses of actions that are predictive of gratifying emotions will be integrated in the interactive discussion as well. Members are encouraged to thank and positively recognize unique functions of each participant in the promotion of positive and conducive changes in the group.

#### Process

The last session is purported to magnify the substantive function of gratitude in the members' psychological well-being. The facilitator puts greater emphasis on the efforts exerted by each member to yield positive cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes stemming from motives to better appreciate their selves, others and situations. Positively appraising the contributions of members is a reinforcing gesture to further enhance their propensity to be thankful of their lives despite challenges they go through. Facilitating dynamic and interactive discussions among the members foster the likeliness that they will pragmatically apply things they have learned

as social support and interpersonal variables are salient predictors of positive outcomes. Members are highly encouraged as well to bring with them new insights that they learned concerning the positive effects of gratitude in attaining a happy and satisfying life.

## 5. Strategies to evaluate the group

**Gratitude Questionnaire Six-Item Form.** Gratitude Questionnaire Six-Item Form is a 6-item inventory designed to gauge members' inclination to gratifying experiences. The test is administered before and after implementing the intervention to check if the members' general tendencies towards greater appreciation towards one's self, others and situations are met.

**Group Appraisal.** The group will be given an opportunity to articulate their evaluation of the group intervention. Members are also encouraged to cite and recognize the significant contributions of the members who have helped in changing the way they appreciate their selves, other people and situations that lead them towards specific accomplishments in life. They are encouraged as well to recognize challenges that they encountered with the sessions facilitated.

**Group Case notes.** These are notes of the facilitator regarding the group events and processes observed in each session for documentation purposes. It is a very important element in the evaluative template of the facilitator as it looks at the progress among the group as a result of the intervention. Most importantly, changes on the members' way of appreciating their selves, others and situations will be closely monitored. It serves as a basis in evaluating the efficacy of the group intervention in meeting the specific objectives in every session.

### 5.1 Referral procedures and follow-up

Given the fact that this group is not a psychotherapy group based on its classification, the procedures for referral must be consistent with the usual protocols that are done in individual counseling or psychotherapeutic sessions. Members who would like to be helped in other emotional and psychological issues are encouraged to set appointments with counselors or psychologists to address their unique concerns. Additionally, the group facilitator can also refer members whom he/she perceived to be in need of further psychological evaluations or interventions to counseling or psychological centers that will best address prospective members' needs.

## 6. References:

- Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2010). It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships, 17*, 217-233.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01273.x>
- Digdon, N., & Koble, A. (2011). Effects of constructive worry, imagery distraction, and gratitude interventions on sleep quality: A pilot trial. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, 3*(2), 193-206.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2011.01049.x>
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 377-389. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377>
- Froh, J. J., Kashdan, T. B., Ozimkowski, K. M., & Miller, N. (2009). Who benefits the most from a gratitude intervention in children and adolescents? Examining positive affect as a moderator. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*, 408-422. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760902992464>
- Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*, 213-233.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.03.005>
- Froh, J. J., Yurkewicz, C., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*, 633-650.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.06.006>

- Hill, P. L., Allemand, M., & Roberts, B. W. (2013). Examining the Pathways between Gratitude and Self-Rated Physical Health across Adulthood. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 54(1), 92-96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.08.011>
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111–131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111>
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 249–266. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.2.249>
- Seligman, M.E.P., Steen, T.A., Park, N., & Peterson, C.(2005). Positive psychology progress. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410–421. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.5.410>
- Watkins, P.C., Woodward, K., Stone, T., & Kolts, R.L. (2003). Gratitude and happiness: Development of a measure of gratitude and relationships with subjective well-being. *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 31(5), 431–452. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2003.31.5.431>
- Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 890–905. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005>