



An Attitude of Gratitude

The centerpiece of ethics

BY BRAD YARBROUGH

When you think of being grateful, you might wonder what it has to do with ethics. Yet the subject is especially relevant as we enter the holiday season and look back on a year marked by worldwide threats of terrorism, economic concerns and deep political divisions. And most importantly, we reflect on what we have (or have not) accomplished in our personal and professional lives.

Over the years, great ethical thinkers have provided insight on this topic. In 1738, the philosopher David Hume wrote, "Of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude..." Similarly, philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that ingratitude, along with envy and malice, was "the essence of vileness and wickedness."

It's easy to see how the concept of gratitude can become elusive. We are only a click away from disturbing stories and countless opinions about events around the globe. With unprecedented access to dreadful images of death and destruction, a

sense of futility can easily take hold. There's a tendency to become cynical, critical and even depressed.

The Evolution of Thanks

In the early years of our country, many state Governors set apart days dedicated to public thanksgiving. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln decreed a national holiday to express gratefulness. This was in the midst of a terrible Civil War in a deeply divided nation during the darkest chapter of its short history. Yet, amidst the carnage and suffering, he called the people to give thanks.

Today, we should take note of a 1998 publication of *Ethics* wherein Patrick Fitzgerald wrote, "Gratitude is not a side issue in the sense that the consequences of gratitude can be significant. Gratitude offers a way to avoid many sources of suffering in ourselves and in others. It offers a way to avoid psychological patterns that can harm us physically and psychologically, destroy our most important relationships and lead to actions that harm others. In all of these ways, gratitude is at the center of ethics, not at its fringe."

There's an important lesson we can take away: We are better individuals, communities and organizations when, in spite of our differences and difficulties, we protect and nurture the trait of gratefulness.

A Contagious Attitude

Chick-fil-A has become synonymous with exceptional customer service. Just look at their website and you'll see why. One of their top executives is quoted saying, "Nearly every moment of every day we have the opportunity to give something to someone else—our time, our love, our resources. I have always found more joy in giving when I did not expect anything in return."

Over the years, I have travelled overseas with executives of the company to conduct business symposiums. These are individuals with tremendous responsibilities and—like all of us—have experienced business setbacks, personal loss and deep disappointments. Yet they are engagingly optimistic and possess genuinely positive dispositions. Their attitude is contagious.



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A columnist with *The Week in Ethics* and *Business Ethics Magazine* wrote, "A culture that sees and celebrates its employees would also have the ability to see and show appreciation for its customers." Chick-fil-A aims at creating a culture that is thankful for its products, employees and customers. This is an essential key to its success. It's demonstrated in the exemplary efforts of a store manager when a drive thru customer got home and realized that her order was short a sandwich. She called the store and was unexpectedly asked for her address. Within minutes, a courteous

and apologetic team member was at her front door with the sandwich and extra nuggets. Gratitude was more than good etiquette...it was good business ethics.

As we witness the downturns in other industries, showing gratitude for the opportunities we have as infrastructure real estate professionals is essential. I encourage you to contribute to a culture of gratefulness this holiday season. It begins with each of us simply focusing on all the people and blessings in our lives for which we are thankful. ✪

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