



LEADER GUIDE

STARTING A **GRATITUDE** PRACTICE

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Human Performance Resources by CHAMP (HPRC) brings the best and most recent evidence-based information on human performance optimization (HPO) to the military community. This Leader Guide offers strategies for unit leaders, trainers, providers, and practitioners seeking to share performance-based information with the Military Service Members you work with. The guide includes an HPO tool, research that supports it, and strategies for implementing the tool in a 1:1 session, hip-pocket training, formal presentation, or casual conversation with those you lead. If you have questions about using this guide, reach out to our subject-matter experts through HPRC's [Ask the Expert](#) portal.



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WHAT IS HUMAN PERFORMANCE OPTIMIZATION (HPO) AND TOTAL FORCE FITNESS (TFF)?

Human performance optimization (HPO) is the process of achieving and sustaining a state of readiness that helps Military Service Members bring their best selves to any goal or mission— both in and out of uniform. Total Force Fitness (TFF) represents all of the dimensions that contribute to health and performance. TFF serves as a “holistic” compass that helps guide Military Service Members’ efforts to focus on the domains that are key to maintaining health and sustaining HPO. HPO enables Military Service Members with different goals, jobs, and responsibilities to work toward reaching and maintaining an optimal level of performance and sustain health and readiness.



Gratitude is when you recognize the good you have received, savor it, and express your appreciation to someone, something, or a higher power. Science shows developing a gratitude practice, like Human Performance Resources by CHAMP's Gratitude Calendar, can help optimize your performance and improve your health across the domains of Total Force Fitness.

The experience and expression of gratitude is universal across all cultures. Gratitude compels you to spread the goodness you received, serves as a social glue that helps you develop stronger relationships, and can enhance your resilience, motivation, and mental health.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand what gratitude is and how it can help optimize performance from a Total Force Fitness perspective.
- Define gratitude recognition skills such as acknowledging and savoring the good, expressing appreciation to someone, something, or a higher power, and paying forward the good you received from others.
- Describe how to use HPRC's Gratitude Calendar to create a gratitude practice that meets performance needs and fits with military life demands.



[Download the PDF version of this graphic here.](#)

HOW GRATITUDE OPTIMIZES PERFORMANCE

Gratitude can help improve readiness and performance across the many domains of Total Force Fitness. Below is a summary of the research on the benefits of gratitude, and the numbers at the end of each item link to the citations for the research articles (to help you learn more in preparation for applying the Gratitude Calendar). Full citations appear in the reference section at the end of this guide.

Those who are grateful are more likely to engage in healthy activities such as eating nutritious food, avoiding abuse of drugs or alcohol, socializing with friends, and engaging in exercise. They're also more likely to seek help when concerned about their health.¹⁻³

People who are grateful tend to sleep longer and report waking up more energized.⁴⁻⁷

Gratitude has a positive impact on mental health in multiple ways, including improving life satisfaction, subjective well-being, the experience of positive emotions, as well as decreasing symptoms of anxiety and depression.⁸⁻¹⁶

Gratitude can build your resilience and help you grow from trauma.¹⁷⁻²⁴

Gratitude protects against burnout for mental health professionals, athletes, and teachers.²⁵⁻²⁹

Gratitude encourages you to be more generous, trusting, likely to help others, willing to volunteer, and likely to vote or engage in other citizenship behaviors.³⁰⁻³³

Gratitude strengthens current relationships and forms new ones, and it increases perceived social support, boosts relationship satisfaction, and makes people feel more able to improve the welfare of others.³⁴⁻⁴⁰

In romantic relationships, the expression of gratitude helps your partner feel more loved, supported, and committed. It also helps your relationship overcome challenging situations.^{38, 41-45}

Gratitude can enhance your leadership.

- ➡ People high in gratitude are seen as wiser.⁴⁶
- ➡ Gratitude can improve your ability to plan and deal with problems.³
- ➡ Gratitude can increase trust in others, and more so with those you don't know as well, so gratitude interventions can help build team cohesion.⁴⁷
- ➡ When you express gratitude to someone, they're more likely to help you as the person who expressed the gratitude and more likely to help others in general.⁴⁸
- ➡ When you express gratitude to others, they feel more valued and are willing to spend more time working on tasks.⁴⁹
- ➡ When those you lead express more gratitude to one another, it can make them more likely to feel comfortable sharing concerns with each other.⁵⁰
- ➡ Gratitude helps employees perform at their jobs better, feel more satisfied at work, and act more respectful to one another.^{51–54}

Gratitude interventions, like the ones used in the Gratitude Calendar, can increase one's experience of gratitude and build the trait of gratitude over time, leading to many of the benefits of gratitude described above.^{4, 49, 55–62}

HPO TOOL: GRATITUDE CALENDAR

HPRC's Gratitude Calendar combines a number of research-based gratitude interventions that span the many benefits of gratitude. Different prompts encourage participants to notice the good that has happened in their lives, reflect on that good, pay it forward, anticipate good that will happen in the future, and express gratitude to others.

HOW IT WORKS

- Experiences of gratitude help you to find people, things, and opportunities that benefit you. Then the expression of gratitude helps you to remember the importance of these assets and to not take them for granted. Gratitude also helps you to strengthen your bond with those you are grateful to, grow those relationships in the future, and be encouraged to help others like you benefited.
- The more you practice gratitude, the more it becomes a trait. This helps you to be more likely to notice opportunities and take advantage of them.^{63–65} Further, your brain rewires to experience more feelings of reward when others benefit (compared to yourself) after keeping a gratitude journal (like HPRC's Gratitude Calendar) for 3 weeks vs. a control group who did a standard (non-gratitude) journaling activity.⁶⁶
- Participants can use the scheduled prompt on the day listed or choose one that they feel best fits them for that day. Part of the strategy behind the multiple prompts in the gratitude calendar is to provide routine as well as variety in an effort to avoid the participant becoming numb to the novelty and benefits of a singular gratitude exercise as was shown in some studies.⁶⁵
- Participants should do the activity at the time that feels right to them. They also should make this fun, not something they need to force themselves to do. Participants don't need to do a gratitude activity every day to receive the benefits since once a week in some studies was sufficient. Throughout many different gratitude intervention studies, however, the longer the participants engaged in the activity, the more likely they saw the results of the outcomes.^{4, 49, 55–62}

GRATITUDE: MAKE IT A DAILY PRACTICE

Gratitude is when you take the time to notice the good you've received and show your appreciation. When you make practicing gratitude a habit, it can help you improve your well-being, performance, and relationships. Use the prompts below to help make growing your gratitude part of your daily routine.

Dates: _____

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Get excited for the week! What are 3 things you're excited for this week?	Don't take life for granted. What do you want to make sure you do NOT take for granted today?	Share the love. What made you laugh, smile, or feel loved today? How will you make others laugh, smile, or feel loved?	Express your gratitude. Who haven't you properly thanked for helping you? Send them a short message to show your gratitude.	Hunt the good stuff. What are 5 things that happened this week that you're grateful for?	Appreciate the moment. What should you notice, savor, and appreciate right now?	Pay it forward. What's an experience, lesson, gift, or talent that helps you feel blessed? How can you pay it forward?
1. My son has his first basketball game of the year on Friday. 2. I'll finish the report I've been working on for weeks. 3. Watching football with my little buddies tonight!	I don't want to take for granted the time I get to spend in-person with my kids and wife. There are so many times I don't get to be with them.	My one-year-old thanked me "sooooo much" for making her breakfast this morning. I can text my wife and tell her I love her.	SFC Tobin Truly went one of his ways to prepare me for my new role. I can send him a quick email to let him know his extra effort has really helped me perform.	1. I got a full night's sleep—3 times this week! 2. I finally finished that report. 3. I played basketball with my son. 4. My wife and I had a fun date night. 5. My unit really supported each other during our fitness tests.	Air conditioning! I'm really comfortable right now and would be miserable without it.	I feel blessed for the good coaches and role models I had throughout my life. They were always there for me when things got tough. I'll go out of my way to congratulate Ricky, my son's teammate, for his performance in Friday's game.

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Print the Gratitude Calendar pages at the end of this Guide or [download the PDF version of the Gratitude Calendar here](#).

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Review the tips below to help you present the Gratitude Calendar in a way that will help those you lead see the value, fully engage, and receive the full benefits of the activity.

Why should they care? Start with a hook! Military Service Members learn best when they know up front why they should spend time learning something before they engage in it.



PLAN & PREPARE

- How can you grab their interest and make them curious to learn more? One study showed that curiosity improves the chances someone will follow through with a gratitude activity.⁶⁷
- Help them reflect on what in their life they might be taking for granted.
- Ask them what might they be missing out on enjoying—or opportunities they might not be taking advantage of—due to a lack of gratitude.



EXECUTE

- Point out that thank-you notes are a key part of the routines of many senior executives. Lead a discussion around why expressing gratitude is key to leadership.
- Highlight specific things your audience might be taking for granted: battle buddies, family, meaningful work, partner, nature, etc. Make the point that there's a big difference between having a great family and truly appreciating your loved ones every day. Point out how easy it is to take things for granted. For example, you could marry the love of your life, but without gratitude, you're likely annoyed with them after a few years. Or you could have a meaningful job, but without gratitude, you might become consumed with grievances that cause you to lose sight of the important impact you make. Gratitude is key to getting the full benefits of all your blessings.
- Use a quote from the [EXTRAS](#) section below to start a discussion about the importance of gratitude.

How would this have helped in the past? Military Service Members come with a wealth of experience and knowledge that serve as opportunities for rich learning.



PLAN & PREPARE

- Help participants reflect on past experiences when practicing gratitude could have been beneficial. Ask them to think about what might make practicing gratitude hard and what are the costs of taking things for granted. Also, help participants reflect on when they experienced the benefits of gratitude.
 - ➡ What did they appreciate?
 - ➡ What are they glad they didn't miss?
 - ➡ When have they been the recipient of gratitude? How did that impact their view of that relationship, their motivation, their self-confidence, and their overall well-being?



EXECUTE

- Explain that the **negativity bias** causes your brain to prioritize, seek out, and lock on to negative information like a heat-seeking missile. You're likely to process negative events more fully than positive ones. This can become a barrier to noticing and appreciating the good.
- Provide examples from your own life when the negativity bias gets the best of you (for instance, you obsess over a negative comment someone made about your work and ignore the many positive comments you receive from others.)
- Offer examples of moments you're glad you didn't take for granted such as the birth of your child or an important work success. Ask others to share similar moments.
 - ➡ Give an example of how you felt when someone expressed gratitude to you.
- Try to have your stories mimic the benefits your audience would gain the most from. For example, if you're working with other leaders, share a time a leader expressed thanks to you and how it improved your motivation.

How will this help them achieve future goals? Military Service Members are ready to learn when they understand that the material will help them deal with real-life situations that can range from mission-essential tasks to events in their personal lives, interests, or hobbies.



PLAN & PREPARE

- Why should your audience care about this activity?
- How will it help them improve their performance on the things they deeply value?
- Which research benefits would they care most about?
- How can you help them see how this activity can bring about these benefits?
- Be sure to try out the Gratitude Calendar yourself and reflect on any benefits you experienced. Also, address any barriers you faced and how you overcame them.



EXECUTE

- Review the **research benefits** described above and talk about the studies that show how gratitude can help those you lead meet their goals (that is, resilience, leadership, team cohesion, performance, and well-being).
- Go over the different prompts and examples on the Gratitude Calendar and discuss how they can help overcome barriers like the negativity bias and/or achieve the benefits of gratitude. For example:
 - ➡ The “What are 3 things you’re excited for this week?” prompt can help you plan ahead to get the most out of the good stuff you’ll experience and boost your motivation for the week.
 - ➡ The “What do you want to make sure you do NOT take for granted today?” prompt can help you make sure you don’t let the stress of work and life cause you to miss out on the limited time you have with your loved ones.
- Share personal examples of how these prompts helped you.

How can they do this activity in their current lives? Military Service Members learn best when topics are provided with clear, real-world examples for application.



PLAN & PREPARE

- Help participants figure out how they can fit this activity into their lives.
- Ask them to consider their work and family demands.
- Are there upcoming deployments or other challenges to consider?
- When are the times it's reasonable for them to do this activity? How can they do it? Where will they do it? Try to be as specific as possible.
- Are there ways you can help them do the Gratitude Calendar with you or others?



EXECUTE

- To set participants up for success, encourage making the practice of using the calendar **a good habit**.
- Suggest combining the time they use the Gratitude Calendar with a routine they already have. For example, they could use it when they wake up in the morning, first sit at their desk for work, or at bedtime.
- Propose they practice the Gratitude Calendar as part of a daily prayer or meditation.
- Recommend they set an alarm to remind them to do the activity at a certain time each day. Or maybe they can print out the calendar and place it somewhere prominent or make it their desktop background.
- Encourage them to do this activity with their family at dinner or on a group text with friends.
- Share examples of how you or others use the calendar to provide real-life strategies.

How can they create their own strategy with the Gratitude Calendar? Military Service Members are more likely to follow through with a task when they have autonomy for their own decisions. To help participants take ownership of the activity, guide them to develop their own strategy for using the calendar in a way that works for them.



PLAN & PREPARE

- When there's too much of a push to do a gratitude intervention in a specific way, participants show less interest in doing it.⁶⁸
- Also, when people feel a high sense of agency, which could be strengthened by letting them design their own strategy, they're more likely to follow through.⁶⁹



EXECUTE

- After reviewing the prompts and examples, ask participants to come up with a plan for how they'd like to use the Gratitude Calendar.
- Encourage them to discuss ideas they can do as a group or alone.
- If possible, have them try their strategy during the session to get them started.
 - ➡ They can do this with you, on their own, or with others.
 - ➡ This provides a chance to see how long it takes, what it feels like, and if any troubleshooting is needed.
 - ➡ The only push you should make is that they use the calendar at least once a week.

Don't forget to follow up! What's working? What isn't? Make sure to check in after participants have started using the Gratitude Calendar to help them AAR the activity and troubleshoot.



PLAN & PREPARE

- Which benefits are they noticing?
- Help them to think about specific tasks, relationships, or their overall mood and energy. How can they build on any areas of growth?
- Which barriers are they facing? How can they adjust fire to improve?



EXECUTE

- After they've had some time to try the activity, ask them how things are going.
- Try to get them to be specific about when and how they're using the Gratitude Calendar.
- Encourage them to reflect on how it's impacted them. Ask them about specific work tasks, relationships, or their overall mood and energy based on what they value most.
- Ask them what they've found difficult. Or if they haven't been doing the activity, find out why.
- Help them brainstorm ways to improve or decide if the activity is useful.

LEARN MORE

You can find out more about gratitude by reading HPRC's articles on how to [grow your gratitude](#) and the [importance of counting your blessings](#). For additional tips on how you can apply good presentation strategies to set up the Gratitude Calendar, read HPRC's article on [how to be a great trainer](#). Contact us through our [Ask the Expert](#) portal if you have any questions, need more information, or to request a training on gratitude for your unit.

EXTRAS

Use these quotes in your presentations and as discussion prompts when talking about gratitude with those you lead.

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.”

–CICERO

“A noble person is mindful and thankful for the favors he receives from others.”

–THE BUDDHA

“Gratitude is essential for society, motivating reciprocation of aid when no other legal or economic incentive encouraged its repayment.”

–ADAM SMITH



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GRATITUDE: MAKE IT A DAILY PRACTICE

Gratitude is when you take the time to notice the good you've received and show your appreciation. When you make practicing gratitude a habit, it can help you improve your well-being, performance, and relationships. Use the prompts below to help make growing your gratitude part of your daily routine.

Dates: _____

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Get excited for the week!	Don't take life for granted.	Share the love.	Express your gratitude.	Hunt the good stuff.	Appreciate the moment.	Pay it forward.
<p>What are 3 things you're excited for this week?</p> <p>1. My son has his first basketball game of the year on Friday.</p> <p>2. I'll finish the report I've been working on for weeks.</p> <p>3. Watching football with my battle buddies tonight!</p>	<p>What do you want to make sure you do NOT take for granted today?</p> <p>I don't want to take for granted the time I get to spend in person with my kids and wife. There are so many times I don't get to be with them.</p> <p>I can text my wife and tell her I love her.</p>	<p>What made you laugh, smile, or feel loved today?</p> <p>How will you make others laugh, smile, or feel loved?</p> <p>My one-year-old thanked me "soooo much" for making her breakfast this morning.</p> <p>I can text my wife and tell her I love her.</p>	<p>Who haven't you properly thanked for helping you?</p> <p>Send them a short message to show your gratitude.</p> <p>SFC Tobin truly went out of his way to prepare me for my new role.</p> <p>I can send him a quick email to let him know his extra effort has really helped me perform.</p>	<p>What are 5 things that happened this week that you're grateful for?</p> <p>1. I got a full night's sleep—3 times this week!</p> <p>2. I finally finished that report.</p> <p>3. I played basketball with my son.</p> <p>4. My wife and I had a fun date night.</p> <p>5. My unit really supported each other during our fitness tests.</p>	<p>What should you notice, savor, and appreciate right now?</p> <p>Air conditioning! I'm really comfortable right now and would be miserable without it.</p>	<p>What's an experience, lesson, gift, or talent that helps you feel blessed?</p> <p>How can you pay it forward?</p> <p>I feel blessed for the good coaches and role models I had throughout my life. They were always there for me when things got tough.</p> <p>I'll go out of my way to congratulate Ricky, my son's teammate, for his performance in Friday's game.</p>



Gratitude is when you take the time to notice the good you've received and show your appreciation. When you make practicing gratitude a habit, it can help you improve your well-being, performance, and relationships. Use the prompts below to help make growing your gratitude part of your daily routine.

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Get excited for the week!	Don't take life for granted.	Share the love.	Express your gratitude.	Hunt the good stuff.	Appreciate the moment.	Pay it forward.
What are 3 things you're excited for this week?	What do you want to make sure you do NOT take for granted today?	What made you laugh, smile, or feel loved today? How will you make others laugh, smile, or feel loved?	Who haven't you properly thanked for helping you? Send them a short message to show your gratitude.	What are 5 things that happened this week that you're grateful for?	What should you notice, savor, and appreciate right now?	What's an experience, lesson, gift, or talent that helps you feel blessed? How can you pay it forward?
						