

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend, welcome to She Said/She Said. Here on this podcast, I'm joining forces with a broad array of topnotch guests to share important life and career lessons, always with an eye toward insight, inspiration, and the drivers that help us build influence. I've spent three decades studying and learning the art of influence. Whether you are starting a business, raising money for a cause, advocating for a promotion or running your own household, understanding influence will increase your chances of success, whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said/She Said Podcast may just be the smartest, most efficient investment you can make in you.

Hey friend, welcome to the podcast. As we get ready to celebrate Thanksgiving in the United States, I've been thinking a lot about gratitude. And because our focus on this podcast is around influence and how to build and sustain it, I want to share a few thoughts that frankly are a little different from how we often think about the power of gratitude. Can gratitude be a component of building influence? Well, let's find out.

I always carry a little notebook in my handbag that I use to jot down quick notes and ideas at meetings. You probably do this too. I remember when my kids were younger, I would grab for my notebook, flip it open and discover, much to my surprise, some secretly drawn artwork hidden on a few of the pages. I would find little hearts and flowers and sweet messages of, "I love you so, so, so, so, so much mommy," that were scrolled in brightly colored crayon. Those little discoveries always brought me such joy in the moment and an incredible jolt of gratitude for the littlest people in my life. I think about their pudgy little fingers often sticky and how they felt when they held my hand. Even though my kids are a bit older and their fingers are now more grown up and slender, this memory still pulls me back into that moment and it fills my heart with so much joy.

I've been thinking a lot about gratitude as we approach the holiday season and how and why little moments and experiences like the one I described can actually have a big impact even when we're recalling them long after the fact. Where does gratitude and the concept of gratitude really come from? Why does it matter? And how does it relate to our big topic of influence?

I don't often see the two concepts of gratitude and influence tied together. And yet the more I dig into and understand the science behind gratitude, the more I see an undeniable link, especially as it relates to our connections with others. And connection of course is absolutely essential for building and sustaining real influence. We hear this from our guests on She Said/She Said Podcast over and over again. The power of connection is often a big part of my guests' stories. Whether it's creating a supportive network of women to help you like Dr. Dr. Katy Milkman's advice club in episode 169, or building long-lasting relationships with mentors, with whom you turns giving and receiving mentorship, or maybe it's building relationships with more non-traditional allies and forging a connection with those who have a very different set of life experiences or even political views. Connection is a big part of influence.

There are many dimensions to how we connect in a meaningful way, and gratitude of course, is one of them. For simplicity's sake, I want to focus on two dimensions related to gratitude. The first relates to the experiences, things, people and memories that generate feelings of gratitude, like my example of the crayon message left for me by my children. The other piece is a more proactive sharing of gratitude with others. Here's what I mean. We can feel grateful for beautiful trees with vibrant fall colors, but the color of the trees don't brighten or change as a result of this expression, no matter how beautiful the language we use may be. However, our recognition of gratitude in that moment, as we internalize the beauty around us, the glorious colors, and we think about how thankful we are in that moment to experience that beauty, that feeling can spark a powerful emotion in us and our brain then

releases dopamine and serotonin. And when we extend that emotion to others in the form of gratitude for them, that's where the magic really happens.

I've been digging in a bit more deeply into the topic and I've come to think of it like a series of electrical charges. Stay with me here. Here's what I mean. We experience something that makes us feel grateful. That feeling then fuels a positive, emotional charge. That positive, emotional charge helps fuel our gratitude that we then pass on to someone else. And that exchange in turn creates a powerful connection. And that connection helps us build influence.

By increasing our awareness of gratitude and the experiences we have that make us grateful, it creates the conditions that help us build more of it. And the more we feel, the more of it we have to extend to others.

Now, if you joined me for episode 167, when Dr. Samantha Boardman joined us, you'll recall that she shared a related dimension of this, that she calls other praising. If you missed that episode, be sure and go back and listen to it because it's fantastic. Rather than just absorbing the positive emotion about how something makes us feel, instead, in Samantha's example, you actively say or do something that acknowledges how wonderful that person is. Here's the example that she shares in her terrific book, which is called *Everyday Vitality*. I've included a link to it in the show notes as well. It's the difference between saying, "Thank you for the flowers; they cheered me up," versus "Thank you for the flowers. You cheered me up."

There is scientific evidence that there is greater positive impact to both the giver of the gratitude and the receiver when it's active and outwardly focused. In work published in *The Gratitude Project*, it's also a terrific book in website and I'll include both in the show notes as well. There is significant evidence that gratitude also thrives on specificity. The more specific you are with the gratitude that you extend to another person, the more authentic that feels because it shows you were truly paying attention. You really saw that person. You got them.

Let me read you an example from *The Gratitude Project* so that you know what I mean. The grateful person says, "I love you for the pancakes you make when you see that I'm feeling hungry and the way you massage my feet after work, even when you're feeling tired, and how you give me hugs when I'm sad so that I feel better." You can instantly see how that feels very specific and very authentic. And it's clearly different and more meaningful than just saying, "I love you." It might be fun to try this at your Thanksgiving gathering this year, especially if your family is inclined to go around the table and share what you're thankful for. If you do that, I'd love to hear what happened and to know if it helped you create a more powerful connection and maybe boosted gratitude for you and someone else.

There's another important dimension of cultivating gratitude that is especially important to mention right now. It relates to reframing loss. So many families are feeling tremendous loss, especially around the holidays. For many of us, those feelings may also be wrapped up with emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and even fear.

A couple of weeks ago, in episode 168, I talked about the importance of reframing and editing our stories, especially the stories we tell ourselves and the ones that we use to shape our identities as we evolve and grow. It turns out there's a big role for gratitude here as well. Experts say that doesn't necessarily mean telling people who are suffering to simply buck up and count their blessings and remember how much they have to be grateful for. That's not all that helpful. What can be helpful is to process a painful or negative event through a lens that's focused on gratitude. To say that another way, reframing or editing what happened by finding some positive dimension or opportunity that came from the obstacle or loss. It might be sharing cherished memories about a loved one who passed away, some way in which the person made your life better and more meaningful, some lasting impact on you. It

could be writing about those beautiful memories, rereading correspondence, or maybe being grateful for a relationship or a job that ended because it opened the door to new opportunities and new challenges.

We often talk about the power of mindset on this podcast, and this really is another great example of how that works in practice. It's also an important dimension of influence. The more we practice reframing the smaller, more frequent daily and weekly challenges, the more muscle memory we build that then makes it a bit easier to reframe the bigger challenges when they come. We can also think of it as yet another way to boost gratitude, gratitude that will help us build and sustain greater influence over time.

If you're looking for ways to further increase your capacity for gratitude, because I do know you love actionable advice, here are couple of exercises that research has shown to be very beneficial.

The first involves asking yourself a series of questions. Now, a version of this is based on a list that was created by Christopher Littlefield for a recent Harvard Business Review article. I'll include the link to that article. You ask yourself, "What recent experience has enabled me to learn and grow? What opportunities do I currently have that I'm grateful for? What physical abilities do I currently have? What was one beautiful thing I saw today or this week? Which people in my life am I most grateful for and why? Who is one person that I don't speak to often, but if I lost them, it would be devastating?" Now for a double dose of gratitude on that one, take this prompt as a cue to reach out to that person and write them a very specific gratitude letter about how they positively impacted your life. "What am I better at today than I was a year ago? What material object do I use every day that I'm thankful for? What has someone done for me recently that I'm grateful for? What are three things I'm grateful for right now?"

Now you can change and create these questions based on what works for you. And you can also craft the answers in your head, but experts say it works much, much better if you do this in writing. I'm going to include this list of questions in the show notes, as well as in the transcript that accompanies this episode. And if you add some of your own, I'd love to hear about them.

You could also use these prompts to create a Thanksgiving game that's a perfect way to involve family members of all ages. You can also use these prompts as part of a regular practice of journaling your gratitude, which is also shown to increase gratitude in individuals who maintain the practice over time. The journaling practice can be as simple as writing down three or five things every single day that you're grateful for. Maybe even just one. What's most important really, the researchers say, is that you build time into your schedule to reflect on the ways that you're grateful and that you do that with a level of discipline. The more you do it, the more you build the capacity. And it's a great way to also set an example and build that capacity in our kids.

Friend, as I think about gratitude, I'm also thinking about you, our She Said/She Said Podcast listener and how incredibly grateful I am for not only the fact that you tune in, but your kind words, your support, the contributions that so many of you have made to help me keep my gratitude charged so that I can share it with others. I am truly, truly grateful. As always, I hope you found today's episode on gratitude and its connection to influence a good investment of your time. And as always, I'd love to hear your thoughts. Please send me a message on Instagram @lauracoxkaplan or via the contact link on the website. In the meantime friend, have a great week and a wonderful, safe, happy, and gratitude-filled Thanksgiving if you're celebrating. I'll talk to you again soon, take care.