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# Appreciation Exercise

## Pro Tips & Examples

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## Step 1.

**Partner A shares about some capacity or specific action that Partner B exhibited or took that Partner A is grateful for or appreciated.**

1. **“Partner B, I appreciate or am grateful that you did \_\_\_\_\_ today.**

**Pro Tip:** A capacity can be a general characteristic about your partner that you appreciate. For example, that he/she is quick to let go of anger after a fight; or is a really compassionate listener; or seems to know what you are thinking/feeling before you do.

A specific action on the other hand is exactly that. It’s something your partner did. For example, “I really appreciated it today when you saw that I was losing patience and you took the phone from me and helped my mother figure out her computer.”

(True story. Not proud of it.)

## Step 2.

**Partner A then asks himself/herself the following questions or completes the following statements. Shares his/her answers or thoughts aloud.**

1. **What that meant to me was \_\_\_\_\_.”**

**Example:** Today, what it meant to me when my wife, Luciana, saw me losing patience and took the phone from me was that she was on my side and there to help.

2. **How did it make you feel that Partner B has this capacity or took this specific action that you appreciate or are grateful for?**

**Pro Tip:** Try to say more than just, “It felt good,” or, “I liked it.”

It is common that nice moments between partners can happen so fast that we barely notice feeling much of anything at the time. Most of us just aren’t in the habit of catching these softer emotions when they happen. And we are even less in the habit of speaking them aloud.

## Re-play it in slow motion

This exercise therefore is an invitation to go back in time, replay the appreciated moment at a slower speed and really zoom-in on the feelings it touched. Chances are good that more emotion was set in motion than you may have been aware. By going back and replaying the moment at a slower speed you give yourself the opportunity to more fully “drop into” the feeling experience that you may not have noticed at the time.



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## Listen with the body

A clue to identify what feelings might have been present is to pay attention to the sensations in your body as you replay the experience in your mind. You might notice, “It made me feel really warm inside.” Or, “I felt so relieved when you took the phone.” It could also be, “I felt sad because of how easily I lose patience sometimes.” Or, even, “I felt like I didn’t deserve your kindness.”

Play around with it. There are no wrong answers and the more you do the exercise the more emotion you will likely start to notice.

**Example:** I “appreciated” Lu taking the phone from me when she did. I got that she was trying to help. But what I was most aware of feeling at the time was the more immediate and superficial emotion of frustration with my mother.

By slowing down and replaying the moment I was able to “drop into” the more vulnerable emotions that my initial reactivity had by-passed. It made me feel warm inside that Lu had stepped in and took care of me the way she did (body sensation). It was like she had given me a hug before I knew I had even needed one.

## Unexpected feelings & emotions

Don't be surprised if one feeling suddenly opens up into other, more unexpected feelings.

**For example**, as I shared with Lu what it was like to have her take care of me, I felt a sudden wave of shame for being such a lousy son to my frail (and truly adorable), 83-year old mother. And I was ashamed of myself as a husband. What a jerk I was.

Ouch! Did not see those feelings coming at all.

### 3. What important quality of being loved did Partner 2's action or capacity touch in you?

**Pro Tip:** To answer this question it can be helpful to start by asking what qualities of love are important to you in the first place. For one person it might be to feel seen and truly heard by his/her partner; for another it might be to feel respected and valued; for yet another it might be to feel genuinely cared about and safe.

**Example:** Luciana's action today made me feel really cared for and loved. It also made me feel safe. It was okay that I overheated. I'm human, it happens to the best of us, and I don't have to do everything by myself.

### 4. What vulnerable feeling(s) that you typically have trouble allowing yourself to feel did Partner B's behavior *lessen*?

**Example:** It is really hard for me to allow that I can sometimes become an irritated little boy. My behavior on the phone with my mother today made my skin crawl. I just wanted to hide.

Talking it through with Luciana however helped me see that my feelings were completely normal and understandable. I'm not a bad son. I'm actually a devoted son who sometimes feels helpless to help his ailing mother whom he loves very much and who loves him.

Today, Lu helped make the intolerable feelings of helplessness more tolerable.



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## Step 3.

**Partner B now reflects and shares what it was like to be appreciated.**

- 1. What happened in your body as your partner was speaking? What feelings, thoughts, sensations, and/or impulses got touched upon hearing your partner's appreciation?**

**Pro Tip:** Most of us are uncomfortable receiving praise. It's not something we are familiar with. As a result, we tend to quickly deflect or, in some other way, minimize the emotional impact of whatever appreciation has just been offered to us.



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“You’re just saying that to be nice,” is an example of both deflection and minimization. Instead of sitting with the feelings (and potential discomfort) of being appreciated, we deflect attention back onto our partner and minimize the depth or earnestness of what he/she has said. Another way we do this is by using humor. (My personal go-to.) In response to our partner’s appreciation, we might say something like, “Did you take your meds this morning?” Yes, it might be funny and might make us laugh, but it also diminishes the emotional impact of our partner’s appreciation of us.

In short, try not to let yourself off the hook. Instead, try to allow yourself to really take in and feel the full weight and significance of your partner’s appreciation. The deeper you are able to receive what he/she has said about you, the deeper you validate him/her and the more you strengthen the bond between you.

**Example:** Luciana said that hearing my appreciation made her feel “so loved.” She had been aware of trying to help both me and my mother when she took the phone, but she had no idea how meaningful that simple-seeming action had been to me. Hearing my appreciation of her made her want to put her arms around me (impulse).

**2. What is it like to hear that this capacity or specific action of yours was/is so important to your partner within his/her own emotional process?**

**Example:** Luciana said that hearing my appreciation had made her feel very tender towards me because it reminded her of how much I do for my mother and how hard that can sometimes be for me.

It made her feel important, she said, that something she did could be so helpful to me in our shared journey of caring for my mother.



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## Step 4.

**Partner A now reflects and shares what it was like to have:**

- 1. Given this appreciation of Partner B (Step 1).**
- 2. Realized what quality of being loved Partner B's behavior touched inside (Step 2).**
- 3. Heard what your appreciation touched in Partner B (Step 3).**

## Step 5.

**Repeat Steps 1-4 with Partner B now giving an appreciation of Partner A.**

## Final Sharing

After you have completed as many round of this process as you like, mutually inquire and share what it was like to go through this process together.

Finally, end the exercise with a simple acknowledgment of closure before you re-enter your regular lives. This can be a fist bump, a high-five, a kiss, a bow, or the ring of a gong.

## About



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