

Reading Segment 1, from the [Guardian](#)

A.J. Jacobs:

“For most of my life, I rarely thought about my coffee, unless it spilled on my jacket. But the last few months have forced me to change that. A recent study showed that gratitude causes people to be more generous and kinder to strangers. Another study summarized in *Scientific American* finds that gratitude is the single best predictor of well-being and good relationships, beating 24 other impressive traits, such as hope, love and creativity.

Earlier this year, in an attempt to battle my default mental state (generalized annoyance and impatience), I undertook a deceptively simple quest. I pledged to thank every single person who made my cup of coffee possible. I resolved to thank the barista, the farmer who grew the beans and all those in between.

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I knew the idea was absurd on one level. It'd be a major headache. It'd be time-consuming and travel-heavy. But it might make me more grateful, which would, in turn, make me less petty and annoyed. Because I needed to be less annoyed. I'd estimate that in my default mode, I'm mildly to severely aggravated more than 50% of my waking hours. That's a ridiculous way to go through life. I don't want to get to heaven (if such a thing exists) and spend my time complaining about the volume of the harp music.

I decide to do this project in reverse, starting with my local café and working my way backward to the birth of the coffee. And so I set out on the Great Coffee Gratitude Trail...”

Questions

1. What are your thoughts and feelings about what you just read?
2. How does the gratitude mentioned in this segment relate to how we opened today's lesson? What are your thoughts and feelings about that?
3. What did A.J. Jacobs set out to do? What was his goal? Why?
4. What did he find and how did it impact him?
5. What are your thoughts and feelings about what A.J. Jacobs set out to do?
6. What additional connections and reflections do you have when reading this?

Reading Segment 2, from [Guernica](#)

“The psychological value of gratitude is no surprise—these days, it is basically a commonplace. But moments of gratitude can have underrated benefits on physical health, as well. Science bears this out: studies show gratitude not only inspires generosity but also helps patients recover more quickly from surgery and improves sleep. Yet practicing acts of gratitude, some so simple as saying thank you, has become a lost art. Excuses are many. We are too tired, feel rushed, or, in a bad mood. Ironically, these missed opportunities for gratitude can boost our own happiness.

In his latest work, *Thanks A Thousand*, author A.J. Jacobs sets out on a gratitude quest to improve his own attitude.

The mission? Thanking everyone involved in the production of his most essential need: his morning cup of coffee. Or, as Jacobs puts it, that “water with a tiny bit of black powder” that costs three bucks.

Crisscrossing the U.S., Jacobs and his journey do more, however, than exhibit the importance of gratitude. He empathically humanizes the coffee supply chain: the myriad people in dozens of countries who create the product ... [many of us] so badly need. The thank yous are far-reaching and often humorous: from the inventor of Zarfs, the official name for those cardboard sleeves that protect our fingers from burning, to Kaldi—the ninth-century Ethiopian goat-herd, who, according to legend, discovered his goats giddy from coffee berries.

But gratitude isn’t always ethically simple. Jacobs also found himself thanking Exxon for facilitating his coffee’s arrival, as the company simultaneously helps destroy the planet. The process of recognizing oneself at the end of the supply chain opened up questions about global commerce.”

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Reading Segment 3, from the [Next Big Idea Club](#)

A.J. Jacobs:

“I tried to thank a thousand people who had even the smallest role in making my cup of coffee possible.

The origin of the idea was that I had started this ritual before meals, where I would say a prayer of thanksgiving. But I’m not really religious, so instead of thanking God, I would try to thank some of the people who made my food possible, like the farmer who grew the tomatoes, and the cashier who rang them up.

My son, who was 10 at the time, wisely pointed out that this was totally lame, because those people can’t hear me. He said, ‘If you really cared, you would go and thank them in person.’ I was like, “That is a nice idea—and a good book idea!” So he earned his supper that night, and that’s what set me off on the journey of going around the world thanking people for my cup of coffee.

And I went wide—so I thanked the obvious people, like the farmer of the coffee beans and the barista. But I also went out to meet the truck driver who drove the coffee beans. I called the woman who did pest control for the warehouse where my coffee beans were stored, and I said, ‘I know this is a little strange, but I just want to thank you for keeping the insects out of my coffee.’ And she said, ‘Yeah, that is strange—but thank you. I don’t get a lot of appreciation.’

In one sense, thanking a thousand people is insane. But on the other hand, I could’ve gone to a million. Think about the guy who drove the truck—you’ve got to thank the people who paved the road, and the people who painted the yellow lines on the road, so the truck didn’t veer into oncoming traffic. And then the guy who made the paint, the guy who made the chemicals for the paint... It was an amazing lesson in how much goes into everything.”

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