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An Interview with Walter Green

author of

This Is The Moment!
How One Man's Yearlong Journey
Captured the Power of Extraordinary Gratitude

1. In your book *This Is the Moment*, you describe your journey of gratitude. How did you come up with this idea?

There were several contributing factors that brought me to the idea of my journey of gratitude. The first major one was the death of my father when I was a teenager. This left an indelible impression on me that life is short, precious, and unpredictable. Another element was that I have developed over many years a process of thinking about current activities in the context of ideal long term outcomes which had me learning about life by reading books about what is most important to people when confronting life ending illnesses. For instance, books like *Tuesday with Morrie*, *The Last Lecture*, and *Chasing Daylight* all were about being authentic, the importance of relationships and conveying messages to people who are important to you before you die. Finally, I was touched by the extraordinary eulogies delivered at the funeral of Tim Russert, the exceptional political commentator, and how bittersweet these tributes were knowing that Tim would never hear them. These happenings led me to ask the question, if it is so important to tell people in a genuine way how you feel about them, why not do it while the people are alive and well which led me to the conception of my year-long journey that I refer to as my victory lap.

2. Why do you call it your victory lap?

The term “victory lap” reminded me of what the basketball icon, Michael Jordan, did when he retired. He went to various arenas in which he played and thanked the fans for their support. I had identified 44 people who I wanted to visit and express my profound gratitude to them for their influence on my life. These people on my victory lap were not fans, per se, but they were special relationships and this journey, like Michael Jordan’s, was both a celebration and an expression of appreciation for these people who added so much to my life.

3. You had no intention of writing a book about your journey? What or who changed your mind?

This was a personal journey by a person who values his privacy. I had never written a book and had no intention of doing so. During the course of the year, when I shared the story of my journey with friends, invariably, they would say, “you ought to write a book”. The message had resonated with many people of all ages. I graciously acknowledged their compliment but kept the focus on completing my journey.

The personal discovery that changed my mind was the realization that expressing deep gratitude and how it had really enriched my life. I found it to be remarkable way to not only enhance my life but also those relationships that were important to me. I literally felt I had “struck gold”. When I looked for similar books on this important dimension, I found none. It was then that I realized that this message had to be shared.

4. How did you decide who you were going to express this gratitude to?

I reflected on my life and asked myself who really made a difference. Some had actually been “road changers” in that I took a different path because of them. Others had a very meaningful influence in some aspect of my life including my personal and professional development, my family and business lives, my health, my financial affairs, my spiritual life and even my philanthropy. I was very surprised that there were 44 people on my list, but each one had met the criteria of having made an important difference in my life.

5. When the idea of expressing gratitude to people first came about, was it always your intention to do it in person?

Yes, for several important reasons I wanted to do it in person. First, I am comfortable communicating authentically, openly, and face to face. Because this may not be the case for others, I have suggested other meaningful ways to do it in *This Is the Moment*.

Secondly, since I had known these people on average for more than a quarter of a century, I had a lot to say and I knew the conversation would take an hour or two. I also wanted to celebrate this occasion by doing something with each of them after the conversation.

Another consideration was that we were so dispersed geographically that I may not see many of them in person unless I created a reason to see them.

Finally, I was fortunate to have the time, the enthusiastic support of my wife and the resources to make the trips.

6. You made this a year long journey? Why?

My wife and I have an active life and in order to be able to visit all 44 people without substantially altering our lives, I decided to do it over this one year period. Another important consideration was that I would also not want to be away from my wife for an extended period of time.

7. How did you tell these people about the purpose of the visit and what was their reaction?

I called each of the individuals and told them that I had decided to express my deep gratitude to those who had been important influencers in my life. I also told them the nature of the conversation and what I hoped we might do after our talk.

Their response was usually some combination of surprise, honor, excitement, and concern. Many of them asked if I was okay. I fully understood their reaction and I reassured them that I was fine.

8. Did you meet with any resistance when you contacted any of your 44 life changers?

I met resistance with only a few people who thought it was a gift I wanted to give to them. They did not feel that they needed the gift but once they understood that expressing this profound gratitude was actually for me, they participated.

9. What is the difference between what you call “episodic” and “systemic” gratitude?

As a child we are taught to say “thank you” for gifts and gestures. These expressions of gratitude are primarily for the benefit of the other person and usually relate to a singular act. My journey was about expressing gratitude for a multitude of influences over the course of these relationships. I call it systematic because it was a whole body of work and quite a bit different than what I call the episodic “thank you”.

10. You also write that gratitude is more than an attitude. What do you mean by this?

I did not read any books on gratitude in anticipation of this journey. When I experienced the depth of the emotions and satisfaction from my experience, I was curious to see if this perspective had been the focus of any books on gratitude. What I found was that books on the attitude of gratitude were more about being thankful for things in our lives. To me this seemed very internally focused. My journey was about expressing specific and explicit gratitude to others. Mine was externally focused.

11. Did each of the conversations of gratitude follow a similar pattern?

The conversations were all quite different but the process was the same for each of these discussions.

I had spent most of my professional life in the executive conference center business and I knew from that experience that people did not like surprises and always valued knowing what was going to be discussed in advance. With that in mind, here are the bases that I covered in our conversations.

These people were really important to me so I thought it would be a good “ice breaker” if we reflected on how we met. Since these relationships had existed on average for over twenty-five years, it was not always readily apparent how we met but we were usually able to figure it out. Whether by chance or intentional, it was quite interesting to reflect on how these relationships were started.

Next I wanted to take a walk down memory lane and share the successes and the challenges we had been through together. It was very revealing that all the relationships had not only enjoyed good times but also were solidified by being there for each other in difficult times.

The third base was the heart of the conversation. It was my time to tell them what they had meant to me. I had notes with me to make sure I did not forget anything. These were just a reference and the conversation flowed very naturally.

The fourth base was to give them an opportunity to share a thought or two about me. Their comments gave me insights into their impressions of me. I learned who I was to them and how I will be remembered after I am no longer here. It served both as a reminder to me of how I could continue to influence people as well as a wonderful mosaic of my life.

12. Not everyone has the time or the resources to do their victory lap the way you did. What advice would you give people who want to start but on a smaller scale?

I have already observed that people who I have shared the story of my gratitude journey with have taken their own initiatives. In my book, I share a poignant story of how one man did it and it is entitled “44 cents” which was how much his profound expression of gratitude cost him. *This Is the Moment’s* focus is on encouraging the reader to think about just one person in their life who have made a difference and to help them decide how best to convey the message. It is my feeling that the experience of doing it will provide the incentive for doing more.

13. What did you get from this journey of gratitude?

What I received from this journey was more than I could have ever imagined or that I could express in a brief response. First was the personal satisfaction of giving this gift of gratitude. I realized that it was a gift that was meant to be given. I had the pleasure of wrapping it, through my preparation, and then giving these very personal gifts. Secondly, by being very explicit about my regard and gratitude to each of them, it allowed me to see these people in a richer and deeper way. It was like seeing these relationships in High Definition. Shining the light of gratitude on these relationships made me appreciate them even more deeply.

When these people expressed their feeling about me, it was as if they had all delivered their eulogies to me and then some. And last but surely not least, having said everything I wanted to about these important people in my life, I achieved an extraordinary peace of mind. I knew that if something happened to any of us, nothing was left unsaid. That alone was reason enough for my journey.

14. How has your victory lap changed the way you live your life or interact with others?

It is very gratifying to see how the story of my journey resonates with people who act on it and how it enriches their lives.

At this stage of my life and really all through my life it is has always been about facilitating and enabling people to do things that they might not have done without me. *This is The Moment* has the potential for influencing far more people, many of whom I will never know.

15. You write that your victory lap has already ignited sparks. Can you explain what you mean by that?

There are two categories of people who are multiplying the effect of this expression of gratitude. The first are those who were on my journey with me who have since begun their own version of the victory lap because it was such an extraordinary experience for them. The second are those who have heard about the journey and are beginning to make their list and contact their life changers.

16. You created a memento for the participants. What was it and why did you do it?

I realized from the beginning that it might be difficult to absorb these rich and uncommon conversations so I decided upfront that I would audiotape them. I also took a picture of each of these visits. When I listened to the audiotapes of my first visits, I realized that the other person may have missed a lot as well. I wanted not only to share this experience but I want them to be able to “save it and savor it”. This led me to creating an audiotape of our conversation and a framed handwritten letter and photograph for each of them.

17. What did the people on the journey get from it?

They were so gratified to know how they specifically made a difference in my life. The idea that I would go to great lengths to visit with them in person touched them as well. My commentary about each of them provided an even better understanding of who they are and what they are capable of doing. The mementos really touched them. Many have shared the audio tapes with their family members. Last but not least, they were grateful to me for having made it possible for them to give their gift of gratitude to me.

18. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

That it is never too early to begin their journey. By doing it now, this simple gesture will not only enhance the reader’s relationships it will provide an all-important peace of mind.

They don’t need to be hesitant because I have provided them with the tools, strategies and the incentive to take their own journey. They do not have to go on a year-long journey and they don’t have to reinvent the wheel. It is all there for them, they just have to start with one and this is the moment.

One of my friends said that the book, *This is the Moment* can frame a message of gratitude like a picture frame can enhance a photograph. He said that he was going to write an inscription in the front of the book expressing his deep gratitude to the person. He went on to say that it would go something like this:

“After reading this book, I didn’t want another moment to go by without me telling you just about the important difference you have made in my life.” He would then be very specific about the nature of the contribution

19. What would you hope might happen in the future as a result of your journey of gratitude and your book?

I am hopeful that my journey and the book can ignite sparks that can transform the way people express deep gratitude thereby enriching their lives and the lives of others. I also feel that *This Is*

the Moment can be transformational and that some day this type of uncommon expression of gratitude would become a normal and natural part of every relationship.

It would be very gratifying if the readers will share their stories with me at www.ThisistheMoment.org.