



The **POWER**
of ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Judith W. Umlas

Advanced Praise for *The Power of Acknowledgment*

“I have always tried to practice formal acknowledgment, and feel I am skilled in that art form, but need to improve my skills at face-to-face acknowledgment. Through her book, *The Power of Acknowledgment*, Judith Umlas has given me the encouragement to be unafraid to voice appreciation more readily. My thanks for an inspirational book.

– Janet Dyke, PMP, APMC, Worldwide Project Management Office, Area Manager-Project Management AT&T Oklahoma

“After reading this book I immediately started looking at ways to acknowledge people. I see the value in it and this book helps you see yourself doing it, and the reminder is good. I could recommend this book to sooo many people.”

– Perry Morgan, CFO, Marietta Corporation, Cortland, NY

“*The Power of Acknowledgment*, what a great little book! I have found it to be a good motivator for me to acknowledge folks around me.”

– Ida Beal Harding, PMP, Trustee, PMI Los Angeles Chapter

“Everyone likes to be thanked or praised for what they do. Not only do you make the other people feel good, you also feel good too. It is sad that so many people do not do that, and it does not cost a penny. Everyone should read this book and put it into practice. Then the world would be a much better place.”

– Sarah Scriven, English teacher, Buenos Aires, Argentina

“Immediately after reading *The Power of Acknowledgment* I started using the principles. After a grueling hour of dental work I told my dentist how much I appreciated the extra time and care he gave me!”

– Lena Randall, grandmother and homemaker

*The Power of
Acknowledgment*



The Power of Acknowledgment



Judith W. Umlas

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Dedication



This book is dedicated first of all to my soul sister and cherished friend, Barbara Leach-Kelly. She was one who truly knew, understood and used the power of acknowledgment every day of her life, many times each day. Barbara, your acknowledgments and your deep, abiding love for me have put me on the path I am traveling today, and help to keep me there. I thank you for all you have given me, and I hope I am able to pass your gift on to others.

I also dedicate this book to my wonderful and always evolving family: my funny, romantic, adorable and, above all, supportive husband Bob Umlas; my awesomely aware, loving and sensitive daughter, Stefanie Umlas; my energetic, caring and creative son, Jared Umlas; my beautiful parents—always full of love and acknowledgment and continuous support for me—Dr. Paul and Sylvia

Wagreich; and my brother Dr. Carl Wagreich, whose humanitarian pursuits and contributions are a constant inspiration, and whose love and commitment mean the world to me.

I am a lucky person to have chosen this family and to have had them choose me!

In love and light,
Judy

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Introduction



What actions would you take if you knew with absolute certainty that a simple action you *could* take every day for no cost and little effort would change your world, and the world at large, dramatically and profoundly for the better? What if this ability is something every person on this planet possesses, yet few use much if at all? What if using it regularly would transform your relationship with your husband or wife? What if doing it would make your colleagues at work not be able to do enough for you, and make the office atmosphere vibrant, productive and alive instead of lethargic, competitive, frustrated and bored?

All of this is possible, yet most people don't recognize this incredible tool or understand its power. What all of us possess, but most of us don't use often enough, is the power of acknowledgment. Many of us have our

reasons for not using it, but these are just excuses, rationalizations that hold us back from achieving powerful, positive results wherever we are or go. I have written this book to help people understand and use a tool that I believe can produce profound and dramatic changes in our intimate circles and far beyond.

How have I come to this conviction? For most of my adult life I have been keenly aware of the effect that heartfelt acknowledgment has had upon the people around me. I tend to acknowledge freely, comfortably, and with appreciation the many gifts people display all the time. These gifts can be talents they have worked hard to develop, the way they present and carry themselves, their thoughtful actions, or their commitment to achieving a goal. There is no scarcity of qualities we can and should acknowledge in the people around us.

Over time, I have come to realize how difficult it is for many people to acknowledge others. I have often wished that I could find an appropriate way to clue them in to just how important it is.

For example, a medical practitioner recently told me how terrified she is of flying and how much it helps her when her husband assures her that everything will be all right just before they get on the plane. She revealed how his calmness and sense of security both relax and

soothe her. “Of course I would never tell *him* that!” she said emphatically.

I was literally speechless when I heard this and couldn’t even react. On my way home, though, I felt I had to step out of my role as her patient and take the risk of suggesting that she tell her husband how she felt about the contribution he makes to her life. “It will transform your relationship,” I said when I reached her on my cell phone. “Will you tell him?” “Well, maybe,” she said. But did she do it? I certainly hope so, but I can’t say with certainty that she did. I’m not sure where this lack of desire to acknowledge another for something that we truly admire comes from, but I often see that people are reluctant to express the positive words, thoughts, or feelings that are in their hearts.

Periodically I’ve found myself becoming an “acknowledgment bridge” by passing along compliments I’ve heard to the person who was praised. Someone will say something nice to me about another person and I’ll assume that this other person knows about it. Yet when I mention the compliment they have received to that person, they are usually totally surprised. “You’re kidding! I had no idea!” they often tell me.

One hard-working, constantly overwhelmed co-worker of mine was amazed and relieved to discover

that she was highly regarded by another, more senior co-worker. As much as she always accomplished, she often felt she was not doing enough, and it thrilled her to hear the acknowledgment. I felt sad, though, that the senior person had never acknowledged her directly. What if I hadn't passed it along? I find it unsettling that this person would not have known how much she was valued!

Passing on acknowledgments has the opposite effect of gossip, which always hurts. And somehow the "gossipee" always seems to find out about it. Being an "acknowledgment bridge," on the other hand, energizes, thrills and empowers the recipient. I pass on acknowledgments whenever I can and am always amazed at the wondrous and surprised response I encounter. But the deeper lesson is that it's even better to directly acknowledge the people we admire, respect or even envy. (In fact, as we'll see later, jealousy and acknowledgment are powerful partners).

My purpose in writing this book is to inspire you to consciously acknowledge the people around you every day—many times a day, if possible. But only acknowledge others when it's appropriate: Acknowledgment is only meaningful when it is done honestly, with good intention and delight, and with no ulterior motive.

People can smell insincerity and they will lose trust in and respect for you.

Once you start this practice, which requires paying attention to the good qualities of the people around you, you will find yourself becoming awed by their accomplishments, talents and wisdom—from a child, to an elderly person, to a sales clerk.

For example, think of the under-acknowledged security people at the airline terminals. Since September 11, 2001 they have been faced with the thankless job of making us remove our shoes, our overcoats as well as our inner jackets, our computers and nail scissors, and making sure we comply with changing restrictions. Watch them light up when you tell them that you appreciate how they are helping to protect us all from harm. I do this each time I am at an airport, and based on my experience, I predict that you will make an extraordinary difference in their day when you acknowledge them! You, too, will feel healthier, lighter, more gracious, more balanced and even more peaceful in doing so.

Imagine what it would be like in divorce court, if husbands and wives acknowledged each other for the contributions to their lives that the other had made, and how each helped the other grow and evolve as a human being—even as they were choosing to go their separate

ways. I actually saw something like this happen at a service held to honor a dear friend who recently passed away. In a heartfelt eulogy, her ex-husband got up to acknowledge the incredible person she was, how deeply she had contributed to his life and how she would do so forever. No one was dry-eyed during his speech, and it challenged everything we all knew about divorce and its aftermath.

While this may sound far-fetched, starting to acknowledge all those who truly deserve it, instead of withholding our true thoughts and praise, could begin to transform the world—person by person—right before our eyes.

This book will teach you how to get those acknowledgments out of your brain (I know they're there!) and into your mouth. Keeping them inside is actually a rip-off both of ourselves and of those we could acknowledge. You and they feel wonderful when you do acknowledge them. And in Chapter 6 you'll see what research points to about the physiological and psychological ways both givers and receivers benefit from practicing this technique.

What makes me such an “expert” in this life-altering habit that I felt I had to write a book about it? When you get down to it, my expertise stems from the power-

ful responses I've gotten from others when I have either acknowledged them for something, or shared insights about acknowledgments from my personal experience.

Years ago I was troubled by the way people spoke to me at my job at CBS Television while I was pregnant. So I wrote an article for a major magazine entitled, "How NOT to Talk to a Pregnant Businesswoman." Overnight, I became the authority on this subject, appearing on Good Morning America and 200 radio stations, just because no one else was talking about this publicly. I had simply been venting my anger and frustration and giving some "rules" of communication that I felt would make things more workable.

My expertise in the power of acknowledgment similarly comes from being frustrated and sad when I see acknowledgment withheld, especially when I also see on a regular basis (as in every day, many times a day) the miracles that happen when you deliver it with generosity! Maybe you could say my capability in this area also comes from having worked in communications for my whole career—from CBS to PBS to cable TV, business television and now corporate learning at a global project-management training company, International Institute for Learning. But I suspect that it comes from my personal inclination, observation, experimentation and—

yes, at times—uncomfortable efforts at communication.

It's from my own experience that I know that acknowledgment is a skill we all have (although it is in need of development, like muscles that improve when you exercise). I've also seen the power of acknowledgment, how it changes the lives, the moods and the self-perception of both the giver and the recipient, each and every time it is practiced. And miraculously, it is available all the time to all of us.

I am committed to giving this power to anyone who will accept it (or giving them the tools to enhance their capabilities in this area if they already practice it) because I strongly believe that we can change the world, one person at a time as we use the power of acknowledgment to turn on the light in ourselves and others. I've seen it happen. With many of us doing this together, the positive change will occur a lot faster and the light will be a lot brighter.

One forewarning, though: as you begin to use this skill, or use it more than you did previously, you might occasionally have to acknowledge someone two or three times before he or she can really “hear” what you're saying, due to their own negative self-image or disbelief. This isn't easy or comfortable, but I will show you the best way to do this. However, most people just eat it up

and melt from the acknowledgment you give them.

The principles I discuss in the pages that follow will walk you through the steps it takes to use the power of acknowledgment effortlessly and to understand how to employ it in all the different parts of your life. In doing so, you will without a doubt make the world a better, healthier, more peaceful and thrilling place for all of us.

