

Front Lines

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The Writing's On The Wall

Bill McCurry



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Most businesspeople cringe when they hear the word “graffiti.” It brings up images of defaced buildings in rundown areas. When our daughter first moved to New York, her California-based parents were appalled at the graffiti on her building. We questioned the safety of the neighborhood until her roommate, a lifelong Manhattanite, told us, “It’s not graffiti. They’re urban flowers. They add color and beauty to an otherwise gray city.”

What does graffiti have to do with a business column that should be priming you for another year of growing profits and sales? Well, graffiti can be good business.

The Gratitude Graffiti Project (www.TheGratitudeGraffitiProject.com)

was started by two moms from New Jersey. “Recovering Perfect Mom” Lucila McElroy is a life coach, speaker and founder of the Perfect Mom Reform School. Her Gratitude Graffiti partner, Candice Davenport, is a public health professional.

Their goal is to focus our energies on why we’re grateful instead of what we want. Positive psychology research has proven the daily practice of gratitude is an important step toward wellness and happiness.

Ever notice our ability to spend is always 115% of our take-home pay? No matter what we have, there’s always something more we “can’t live without.” That keeps our consumer economy chugging along, but it also focuses our attention on what we don’t have.

Instead, let’s focus on the positive. Candice and Lucila believe—and can quote credible research—an activity practiced for 21 to 40 days will become a habit. They can point to specific cases where embracing the habit of gratitude has changed lives.

What started with business owners writing gratitude statements on their windows with washable markers has spread to community “bulletin boards” that morph art with gratitude.

Two librarians from Highland Park, New Jersey, started the program by handing out brightly colored cards. They asked patrons to write down what they were grateful for. Then the cards were made into garlands and strung around the library. The librarians report children were the quickest to adopt the concept and return frequently to view their public postings.

At the nearby Rutgers Barbershop, visitors can write on the shop's windows making a public statement of why they're grateful. The barber reports people line up waiting for him to open, not just for haircuts but to put their public gratitude statements on his window for all to see.

The barbershop and library are known as Gratitude Stops—public places reminding passersby, for a minimum of 40 days, what they can be grateful for. Often these stops will provide the needed supplies so observers can become participants and “give a gift to their community by writing what they are grateful for” so everyone can read and be enriched as well. Through modern communications; The Gratitude Project is already international with communities as far away as British Columbia adapting the New Jersey idea.

Did we perhaps spend too much of 2013 complaining, feeling frustrated, sorry for ourselves and otherwise less than joyful? What can we do to encourage gratitude statements from our employees, customers and community?

At your business, the Gratitude Stop could be a wall of your building or a bulletin board near the cash register. It could be on your windows or your vehicles. It can be as much an art form as it is a public display underlining people's attitudes. Involve your team to determine ways you can bring this rejuvenation process into your community. Think beyond the garden. Think of it as expressing our humanity.

So as we start 2014, it's only fitting that I publically share my gratitude. I'm most grateful for my loving family. The glue holding it all together is my bride of 46 years who has taken the products we all love and sell and skillfully created a backyard paradise where I can work and write columns for you, weather permitting. I'm truly grateful for and honored by your readership. And I'm grateful I can wish you a healthy, successful and grateful New Year! **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.