

Filling Buckets

By Jeri Mae Rowley

In 2002, Donald O Clifton, Ph.D., former chairman of the Gallup Organization, was honored by the American Psychological Association as the "Father of Strengths Psychology" and the "Grandfather of Positive Psychology. These awards recognized Dr. Clifton's half century of study to understand the effects of "positivity" on people and organizations.

That same year, Dr. Clifton was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of cancer. He knew his time was growing short, and he spent his last few months working on the book so many people had urged him to write. Dr. Clifton asked Tom Rath, global practice leader in strengths-based development for Gallup -- and Dr. Clifton's grandson -- to help. They finished the book shortly before Dr. Clifton died. Their collaboration, "How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life," was released August, 2004 by Gallup Press

For over twenty years, Dr. Clifton taught the power of positivity by using a parable of the Dipper and the Bucket. This parable tells us that we each have a metaphorical bucket. Our bucket is filled by positive interactions with other people, and emptied by negative ones. We feel great when our bucket is full. We feel rotten when our bucket is empty. We also have a metaphorical dipper that we can use to empty or fill other people's buckets.

An organization populated by people with "full buckets" would have much more positive energy than one of people with "empty buckets" -- and would be more productive and profitable. The parable concludes with one of life's simplest, but most powerful, lessons: "When we fill another person's bucket, we fill our own."

The parable gets backed up with international research. For instance, one study done in the United Kingdom measured "boss-induced hypertension." The researchers found that people who harbored real dislike for their bosses over long periods of time increased their risk of heart disease and stroke by one-third. So next time you hear someone say, "My boss is going to be the death of me" . . . it might be true.

Data from the U.S. Department of Labor show that the main reason people leave their jobs is because they don't feel appreciated. A Gallup Poll shows that in the last year, 65% of people received no recognition for good work in their workplaces. So clearly, there aren't enough positive moments or interactions happening in the workplace. As a result, our economy suffers, companies suffer, and individual relationships suffer.

Adding to someone's bucket, drops, begins by taking an inventory of all the momentary interactions we have with people every day. According to Rath, "Our relationships with people are formed by small moments -- and relationships are crucial in business."

Daniel Kahneman, one of Gallup's senior scientists, suggests there are approximately twenty thousand bucket-impacting moments in a given day, and each one lasts about three seconds. Those three-second interactions are rarely neutral; they're almost always positive or negative. And, we can deliberately choose to make them positive or negative.

But, before you start trying to fill someone else's bucket, the authors urge us to think about the individual's unique likes and dislikes. Anyone who manages another human being needs to ask questions to understand what really is positive, and what really is negative for that individual. Recognition is a very, very personal thing. Some people want their name in lights, and others just want a quick pat on the back. Much of the recognition is misguided. In other words, one person's positive drop is another person's negative dip.



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Fill your own bucket to the brim with an approach that transforms your briefest interactions into opportunities. This month, dip into the positive strategies offered in the bestselling book "How Full Is Your Bucket?"

Delightful Drops from "How Full Is Your Bucket?"

- We experience approximately 20,000 individual bucket-impacting "moments" every day.
- These moments can be positive, negative, or neutral.
- Moments are rarely neutral.
- We can deliberately choose to make the moments positive or negative.
- The number-one reason people leave their jobs: They don't feel appreciated.
- Sixty-five percent (65%) of Americans received no recognition in the workplace last year.
- Bad bosses could increase the risk of stroke by 33%.
- A study found that negative employees can scare off every customer they speak with -- for good.
- Nine out of 10 people say they are more productive when they're around positive people.
- The magic ratio: 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction.
- Too much positive emotion? More than 13 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction could decrease productivity. (It's not reality to have such a high positive:negative ratio so people feel they are being used.)
- Extending longevity: Increasing positive emotions could lengthen life span by 10 years.

Go to the official Web site of the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* national bestseller, *How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life* -- a book that uses a simple metaphor about a dipper and a bucket (backed with decades of research) to show how even the briefest interactions affect your relationships, productivity, health, and longevity. www.bucketbooks.com

Jeri Mae Rowley, M.S. Human Resource Management, is a popular speaker, trainer and facilitator. By weaving together her unique humor and storytelling skills, Jeri Mae helps individuals and organizations improve leadership, communications, and customer service. Participants in her programs often comment: "She's not boring!"

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