



## The Gratitude Edge: Strengthening Philanthropic Success Through the Well-Being of Leaders and Staff

The noble profession of philanthropy is rooted in humanity—a deep commitment to improving lives and communities. In recent years, philanthropy staff have been helpful in creating awareness around the importance of gratitude, not only for a patient or family member to express it but also for the benefits it gives the recipient, usually a caregiver. Yet, those same philanthropy staff rarely take the opportunity to address their complex challenges—many of which have intensified in recent years due to economic, social and institutional shifts. Because of these challenges and dedication to their profession, we recommend the spotlight also reflect on the health and well-being of philanthropy leaders and their teams for the purpose of serving the common good.



## The Gratitude Edge

Research and evidence-based practices in gratitude have been shown to support overall well-being, enhance leadership effectiveness, strengthen team engagement and deepen relationships with clinicians, senior leaders and donors.

To achieve any of these outcomes and improvements, we must begin with each individual experiencing the overall health and well-being for themselves. Various gratitude interventions have been shown to:

- Lower depressive symptoms and perceived stress<sup>1</sup>
- Increase sleep quality and reduce blood pressure<sup>2</sup>
- Improve emotional exhaustion, depression, subjective happiness and work-life balance<sup>3</sup>

### WHY WELL-BEING MATTERS IN PHILANTHROPY

A 2024 report by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) underscores growing concerns around burnout, staffing shortages and organizational capacity.<sup>4</sup>

#### BURNOUT IS A CRISIS:

**95%** of leaders express some level of concern about staff burnout.

**33%** say that they are “very much” concerned about their own burnout.

**76%** indicate that burnout among their staff is at least slightly impacting their organization’s ability to achieve their mission.

**25%** report that burnout is moderately or significantly impacting their ability to achieve their mission.

#### STAFFING CHALLENGES PERSIST:

**60%** identified staff-related departures, including stress and burnout and inability to provide competitive pay/benefits.

Nearly **50%** find it difficult to fill staff vacancies.

Only **50%** reported that their foundation engaged in practices to support their staff’s well-being.<sup>5</sup>

Further, a 2023 survey conducted by the National Council of Nonprofits found nearly **75%** of nonprofits reported persistent job vacancies...severely impacting the sector’s ability to serve communities.<sup>6</sup>



## **What would it look like if well-being was a pillar of your philanthropic strategy?**

### **Building and Fostering a Culture of Gratitude**

Once we have a personal understanding of the science of gratitude, we can further integrate the research into leading and motivating our staff, increasing staff engagement and strengthening relationships with senior leaders and clinicians to foster a culture of gratitude and align their support with philanthropy goals.

### **As a Leadership Strategy**

We found that leader gratitude expression was positively related to employee work engagement, which in turn was positively related to employee self-development behaviors.<sup>7</sup>

## **What gratitude practices could energize your team and elevate engagement?**

Additionally, research from the fields of positive organizational scholarship and positive organizational behavior suggests that workplaces aiming to increase job satisfaction can do so through organizationally-based gratitude interventions and by institutionalizing gratitude into workplace culture.<sup>8</sup>

## **What gratitude practices could elevate key relationships with senior leaders and clinicians?**

### **Strengthen Relationships with Senior Leaders and Clinicians**

Researchers have also found that gratitude collectively strengthens relationships and mutually responsive behaviors.<sup>9</sup> It is beneficial for senior leaders and clinicians who may not understand their role in philanthropy or feel valued by development. Tailoring gratitude experiences specifically to the individual leader and clinician can generate intrinsic motivations, aligning their purpose with the philanthropic mission. This, in effect, broadens to “collective gratitude,” further cultivating a culture of gratitude.

## **How can you embed gratitude and well-being with board members and donors?**

### **Extending the Culture of Gratitude for Board and Donor Engagement**

Once established as a well-being and cultural imperative, philanthropy teams are better prepared to integrate their knowledge and experiences to further enhance relationships with foundation board members and deepen connections with donors. The joy of generosity and gratitude’s reciprocal role is essential in cultivating actionable and meaningful board and donor relationships, their continued engagement and retention. One study established that grateful people show stronger neural signatures of pure altruism in reward regions of the brain.<sup>10</sup>



## How does your team's gratitude practice align with your philanthropic goals?

In health care philanthropy, your people are your greatest asset—and their well-being directly impacts your mission. As you navigate increasing demands, cross-functional collaboration and evolving donor expectations, it's time to ask:

-  What if your team's well-being was treated with the same urgency as campaign goals?
-  How can gratitude become a daily leadership practice that energizes your staff and strengthens your partnerships with clinicians and senior leaders?
-  How are you recognizing and celebrating generosity—not just from donors but within your team?
-  What cultural shifts could make your foundation a place where people thrive, stay and give their best?

**Gratitude is more than a gesture—it's a leadership strategy** that enhances retention, engagement and giving.

**Let's work together** to embed it into your culture, elevate your people and advance the healing mission you serve.

**For more information** on our well-being programs for philanthropy leaders and staff, contact **Linda Roszak Burton** at [Linda@AccordantHealth.com](mailto:Linda@AccordantHealth.com).

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25222798/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25736389/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17439760.2020.1789707>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cep.org/news/press-releases/nonprofit-leaders-cite-burnout-as-a-top-concern-in-a-new-study-on-the-state-of-u-s-nonprofits>

<sup>5</sup> [https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CEP\\_Research\\_Snapshot\\_Series\\_WB\\_FNL.pdf](https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CEP_Research_Snapshot_Series_WB_FNL.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/nonprofit-workforce-shortage-crisis>

<sup>7</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-023-05221-9>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=26232>

<sup>9</sup> <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2012.00439.x>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2017.00599/full>



## LINDA ROSZAK BURTON, ACC, HWBC, BBC

Principal Consultant & Certified Executive Coach

Linda Roszak Burton brings 25 years of experience aligning strategic goals and organizational values through leadership development and employee engagement initiatives. As an academic researcher and an executive coach, she combines evidence-based practices in strength-based psychology, gratitude, contemporary neuroscience and healthy work environments. Linda guides executives and their teams to achieve optimal organizational well-being through progressive leadership capabilities. Linda is an ICF-ACC Certified Professional Coach, holds certifications in Brain-Based Coaching from the NeuroLeadership Institute and Positive Psychology Health and Well-Being Coaching through the College of Executive Coaching. She is preparing for board certification

by the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) and the National Board of Health and Well-Being Coaches.

She is an Affiliate Member of IOC at McLean Hospital, a Harvard Medical School affiliate and a member of the NeuroLeadership Institute (NLI). Linda received her degree from Virginia Tech in Health Education and is pursuing an M.S. in Negotiation and Conflict Management at the University of Baltimore.

Linda is the author of *Gratitude Heals ~ A Journal for Inspiration and Guidance*, and writes a feature series on gratitude for the Wharton Healthcare Quarterly. Her TEDx Talk, *The Power of Gratitude to Heal the World*, was released in 2022.

*“Working with Linda on cultivating gratitude in the workplace has been a truly transformative experience. Her approach is both insightful and practical, helping me not only recognize the power of gratitude but also embed it meaningfully into our daily operations and culture.”*

*Linda has a unique ability to create space for reflection while also driving real action. Through her guidance, I’ve seen measurable improvements in team morale, communication, and a renewed sense of connection among colleagues. Her work reminded me that gratitude isn’t just a feel-good concept—it’s a strategic tool for fostering engagement, leadership growth and enhancing well-being.*

*I’m deeply grateful for Linda’s wisdom, warmth, and ability to lead by example. She has left a lasting impact on me and my team, and I highly recommend her to anyone looking to elevate their work culture in an authentic and sustainable way.”*

—DR. NAT’E GUYTON, DM, MSN, RN, NE-BC, CPHIMS  
Health Care Executive

*“During COVID, the CEO made a focused effort to strengthen the senior leadership team’s well-being, support teamwork and optimize performance. Linda’s Foundations of Grateful Leadership Program was an ideal fit to reinforce a culture of appreciation, belonging, inclusivity, diversity and equity. The team sought a coaching program grounded in research and aligned with the organization’s mission, vision, values, and Catholic identity. Rooted in gratitude, positive psychology, neuroscience and positive organizational science, the program offered a strong foundation for leadership development and well-being.*

*Coaching sessions were tailored to deepen understanding of current research and apply advanced gratitude practices in a welcoming, values-based environment. This program effectively infused the science of gratitude, strengthened trust and enhanced cohesion within this high-performing team, aligning leadership behaviors with organizational values and fostering a more resilient, connected and purpose-driven culture.”*

—MARGARET HAYES, MS  
Past Board Member & Past Mission Committee Chair  
Ascension Saint Agnes