

GIFT OF TIME

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **3X/WEEK** | Duration: **VARIABLE**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

When we're busy, it's easy to sacrifice quality time with others in favor of work and other obligations. But that can lead to regrets: We fall out of touch with friends, or miss out on our kids' milestones. This exercise ensures that we allocate time for the important people in our lives.

In turn, taking time for social connection allows us to build up a store of positive experiences and supportive relationships that we can draw strength from in the future, potentially leading to **better health and more success at work** or helping us through hard times.

Plus, the gift of time is absolutely free—it's one that anyone can give.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Think of a person whom you care about.
2. What might you be able to do for this person that entails nothing more than the giving of your time? Certain acts of kindness involve gifts of money or goods, but, in this exercise, your mere presence is the gift.
3. Plan a gift of time for this person and give it, whether it means doing something with them (in person or virtually) or doing something special for them on your own. Try to set aside enough time to really connect with this person. You can spend a few hours or even a few minutes of your time, as long as your goal is to show your love.
4. As you dedicate your time to that person, try to avoid any shortcuts or distractions. You might even consider taking off your watch or putting away your mobile device. Remember that the quality of your time is more important than the amount of time you spend with that person.
5. If you did something for them on your own, do not tell the recipient of your gift how much time you spent. Let the gift speak for itself.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Gander, F., Proyer, R. T., Ruch, W., & Wyss, T. (2013). **Strength-based positive interventions: Further evidence for their potential in enhancing well-being and alleviating depression.** *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(4), 1241.

Participants were assigned to give three "gifts of time" by meeting up with three people they care about in the same week, above and beyond their normal activities. Compared to a group who journaled daily about their memories, they reported greater happiness one month later. The longer they continued the practice after the initial week, the greater their happiness boost.

WHY TO TRY IT

Time is one of the most precious gifts we have to give, particularly in an age when technology seems to garner our constant attention. This exercise encourages us to think more carefully about how we spend our time.

Devoting time to others is a gesture of kindness and love that can not only make us feel good but also make others feel good and deepen our relationships. And because each social interaction is different, we have countless opportunities for new positive experiences.

SOURCES

[*A Primer in Positive Psychology*](#), by Christopher Peterson, Ph.D.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

