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Moosic woman on a campaign to 'spread thanks'



CHRISTOPHER DOLAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Elena Anguita at her Moosic home Dec. 26. Anguita's "Spread Thanks" campaign encourages her followers to hand write one thank-you note each day.

BY JON O'CONNELL, STAFF WRITER / PUBLISHED: JANUARY 6, 2020

MOOSIC — Elena Anguita doesn't claim to be a therapist. She once felt skeptical of the mindfulness movement. And she never thought she'd write a book.

The sales executive just knows a simple, deliberate effort to show daily gratitude has changed her to her core and now she's teaching others how to do it, too.

In 2014, Anguita got a "whoosh."

She was putting away laundry in her Moosic townhouse. She felt suddenly compelled to write a thank-you note; not just one, but one every day, by hand.

"In my mind's eye, I saw the phrase: 'A thank you a day,'" she said.

So she started with her closest, easiest circles — family, friends and colleagues. When she maxed out, she got creative. Hotel housekeeping staff and grocery store clerks got them. She's written a couple to herself on quiet days. She can count the days she's missed on one hand.

“I noticed that whatever mood I was in before I wrote the thank-you note, when I was done with it, I was happy and I was grateful,” she said.

When a Pittsburgh hotel housekeeping staffer left a heartfelt note and signed her name, Jessica, Anguita knew her little practice had the potential to spark a movement.

“I am the kind of person who feels in the deep part of my heart that we’re here to do something. We’re here to serve on some level,” she said.

She’s divorced with no children, and long grappled with how to contribute in the absence of raising kids.

It wasn’t until she started noticing big things — she used to call them “daily serendipities,” now she calls them “miracles” — that she decided to share what she learned on a larger scale.

She wrote a book last year called “Spread Thanks: Create Miracles Through the Power of Ink” that chronicles her journey and encourages people to try gratitude for themselves.

She’s become a de facto motivational speaker, and taught a dozen or so workshops, including one at Misericordia University last year. She inspired the school’s director of the Center for Adult and Continuing Education, Paul Nardone, who sits on the university’s leadership team, to introduce Thankful Thursdays.

One day each week, seven people on the dean’s council write thank-you notes. In October, Nardone chaired a regional conference and wrote personal thank-you notes to all 33 committee members.

“I cannot tell you how many people came back to me and said not only how much it meant to them, but that they’ve never experienced something like that,” he said. He envisions rolling out Thankful Thursdays for faculty and staff at large, and even bringing students on board.

Handwriting has long been linked with cognitive function. Anguita and Nardone both find that writing a note by hand, instead of typing one, centers them. It focuses their attention on feeling gratitude, and helps them to be mindful. After a disagreement with her sister, Anguita wrote her a thank-you note and tried steering toward the parts of their relationship she was grateful for.

She started it still feeling a little frosty, she admitted, but by the end felt overcome by gratitude.

“The way you impact culture is by doing,” Nardone said. “You can’t just say: ‘Fix the culture.’”

He can’t make an entire student body write thank-you notes every day or even once a week, but he might be able to get them to try it once and see what it feels like, he said.

Anguita brought her workshop to more than 300 freshman in the University of Scranton’s Panuska College of Professional Studies.

Dean Debra Pellegrino, Ed.D., met Anguita on an airplane. Pellegrino was coming home from a conference; Anguita from a work trip. Both have exchanged thank-you notes since then.

Thank-you notes, however simple, line up with the Jesuit Christian values the university is built around, Pellegrino said, and she’s in the early stages of planning research on Anguita’s specific mode of gratitude.

“My goal is to connect her ‘Spread Thanks’ mission with the Jesuit mission of gratitude,” she said.

Anguita created a product line of books, blank thank-you cards and beaded jewelry to help remind you to be grateful. But those are merely tokens, she said.

For some people, buying things triggers a sense of responsibility. It’s the same reason you’re more inclined to exercise if you buy a gym membership.

“I strongly feel that the world is not going in the right direction. People are quite divisive and divided in not just America, the world,” she said. “We have to shift this.

We have to put more positivity in the world.”

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