

Thank them now

A short book about noticing what's wrong as a matter of habit, and missing most of what's fine

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit. You walk into a room and your eye goes to what's wrong with it. You read a piece of work and find the error. You hear a remark and catch the tone. The things that are fine, which are most things, pass through you without leaving a mark, and the things that aren't get noticed, remembered, and usually said.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that this habit makes sense from the inside. The faults are real, you're usually right about them, and someone with your standards is useful to have around. The second is that the habit is a trick of attention and not a report on the world. What's fine sends no signal and what's wrong does, so a mind that goes where the signals are ends up with a list of faults and calls it the truth of the place. The people around you hear that list and nothing else, and they draw their own conclusions about what you think of them. The third is practical. When you notice something's fine, you say so, to the person, at the time, and specifically. When you notice something's wrong, you decide whether it needs saying before you say it. Chapters 18 to 21 cover how.

This book doesn't ask you to stop noticing faults, lower your standards, think positively, or keep a notebook of things you're grateful for. It asks you to notice that you've been keeping only half the record, and to say the other half out loud.

Two cautions.

If the scan is aimed mostly at yourself, so that the running list of faults is about what you did wrong, that's a related habit with its own book, named in the notes. This one is about the scan turned outwards.

And if it's not that you fail to notice what's fine but that nothing has felt fine for a couple of weeks, if you've lost pleasure in things you used to enjoy and feel low most of the day, treat that as a change in your health and see a GP. Low mood flattens everything, and no amount of looking for the fine will find it while the mood is doing that.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

The pan on the hob

You get home at half past six. You've been thinking about the evening in the car, and the thought was mostly about what still needs doing. You open the front door, walk into the kitchen, and see the pan on the hob. The one from breakfast, with the porridge dried onto it. Your partner has been home for an hour.

You say something. Not much. "The pan's still there." Or you don't say anything and pick it up with a sound that says it for you. Your partner says, "Yes, I was going to do it." There's a pause, and then they say, to nobody, "You're welcome for the table." You look at the table. It's been cleared, wiped, and laid for two. The post has been opened and sorted. The school bag is by the door with tomorrow's kit in it. You hadn't seen any of that. You'd seen the pan.

This is an invented household, but I think the shape of it will be familiar. It doesn't only happen at home. At work you read the quarterly report your colleague spent three days on, and your first sentence is that the total on page four doesn't match page nine. You're right. It doesn't. The other forty pages are good and you haven't mentioned them, because there was nothing to mention. Your daughter shows you her maths homework, twenty questions, and your eye goes to the two with a cross. You point at them. She puts the book away.

None of these are outbursts. You're not shouting and you're not unkind. You'd say, if asked, that you're paying attention, and you are. It's just that the attention only produces a remark in one direction. When something's wrong you notice it, and often you

say it. When something's fine you don't notice it, or you notice it as an absence, and there's nothing to say about an absence. Over a day, the people around you hear the remarks that got made. They don't hear the ones that didn't, because there weren't any.

Some words, so we can talk about this without going round the houses. I'll call the running check for what's wrong **the scan**. It runs on its own, it's fast, and it's usually accurate. What it produces I'll call **the fault list**. The things that are working, which is most things, I'll call **the fine**, or what's fine. The difference between the two is that a fault sends a **signal** and the fine doesn't. The pan announces itself. The cleared table doesn't. What the people around you hear, which is the fault list read aloud, I'll call **the commentary**. And what this book is asking you to add I'll call **the thanks**, meaning something said to the person, at the time, about the specific thing that's fine.

Before you go on, try one thing. Pick a day, tomorrow if you can, and count. Every time you remark on something that's wrong, out loud or by a look, add one to the first column. Every time you remark on something that's fine, add one to the second. Don't try to change anything. Just count. Most people who do this are surprised by the first column and can't remember the second, and that gap is what the rest of the book is about.

Why the scan seems sensible

I'm not going to pretend the scan is a defect. If it were, you'd have dropped it years ago, and you haven't because it earns its keep. Before I say anything against it, it's worth being honest about what it does for you.

It catches real faults. The total on page four really was wrong, and if it had gone to the board like that, your colleague would have been in trouble. The two crosses on the homework are two things your daughter doesn't understand yet. The pan will be harder to clean tomorrow. The scan isn't inventing problems. It's finding them, and finding them early is worth something.

It's what standards feel like from the inside. You care how things are done. A wrong total bothers you in a way it doesn't bother some people, and the bother is the standard doing its job. If you stopped noticing, you'd worry you'd stopped caring, and a person who doesn't care how the report reads is worse company than one who does.

It feels like realism. The world is full of things that are slightly wrong, and someone has to see them. The people who go about saying everything's lovely strike you as either not looking or not honest, and you'd rather be the one who looked.

It feels like somebody has to. In a household or a team, there's often one person who holds the list of what needs doing, and it's usually the one who sees what's wrong. If you stopped, who would

notice the pan? You suspect the answer is nobody, and the house would fill up with pans.

It's how you were raised, for many readers. There was a parent, or a teacher, whose attention worked this way, and you learned that this is what a serious adult looks like. Praise was rare and meant something. Remarks on faults were the ordinary weather. You turned out capable, and you credit the weather.

And it feels like care. You wouldn't bother pointing out the wrong total to someone whose work you didn't take seriously. The scan is, in its way, a compliment. You hold people to the standard because you think they can meet it.

All of that is true, or true enough. What I want to show you is that the scan does all of this while keeping a record that's wrong, and that the people around you are living inside the record and not inside your intentions. That's the next four chapters.

"I'm just observant"

The first belief to look at is that the scan is perception. You see what's there. Some people notice less and you notice more, and the faults you notice are there to be noticed. That's not a habit, it's eyesight.

I'd put it differently. You're observant, and the scan is what observation turns into when only half of what's in front of you sends a signal.

Timothy Wilson and Daniel Gilbert, two psychologists who study how feelings fade, published a model in 2008 of what they called affective adaptation, which is the process by which our emotional response to something weakens after we've been exposed to it. Their account runs like this. People attend to events that matter to them and that they can't yet explain. They react. Then they explain the event, reach an understanding of it, and once it's explained, they attend to it less and feel less about it. The thing hasn't changed. It's been filed.

Now apply that to the kitchen. The cleared table is explained. You know why it's clear, it's clear most evenings, there's nothing about it that needs understanding. It was filed long ago, and filed things don't get looked at. The pan on the hob is unexplained. It's not usually there, it shouldn't be there, and something about it needs accounting for. So your attention goes to the pan, and it goes there before you've decided anything. You didn't choose to see the pan

and not the table. Your attention is built to go to the thing that isn't filed, and faults are almost never filed, because a fault is by definition the thing that isn't as it should be.

A smoke alarm is a fair comparison for two sentences. It's silent while the house is fine and loud when it isn't, and nobody thinks the alarm is giving a report on the house. It's giving a report on smoke.

The scan is the same. It's silent about the fine, not because the fine isn't there, but because the fine makes no sound. So when you say you're just observant, you're right about the faults and wrong about the rest. You're observing one half of the room, the half that's ringing. The other half, the table, the post, the school bag, is there and doing nothing to attract you, and you'd have to turn and look at it on purpose.

That's the first thing I'd like you to take from this book. The scan isn't a sharper eye. It's an ordinary eye, pointed by the way attention works, at whatever is unexplained. A person who notices what's fine as well isn't less observant than you. They've learned to look where nothing is ringing, which is a separate act and one that has to be chosen.

"I only mention what matters"

The second belief is about weight. Fine, you might say, the table doesn't ring, but that's because it doesn't matter. Faults are what matter. A wrong total matters and forty right pages don't, because right is what they were meant to be. You mention what matters, and what matters is what's wrong.

There's something in this. A wrong total does need fixing and a right page doesn't. But the belief goes further than that. It says that the fault is bigger than the fine, and that's not a fact about the report. It's a fact about how a fault feels to you.

Paul Rozin and Edward Royzman, in a review published in 2001, described what they called negativity bias, the general tendency in people and other animals to give more weight to bad things than to good things of the same size. They broke it into four parts. Bad things are stronger than equivalent good things. Bad things loom faster as they approach. When good and bad are mixed together, the result comes out more negative than adding them up would predict. And bad things are more varied and get more thought, so a mind has more to say about them.

In the same year, Roy Baumeister and three colleagues published a long review with the title "Bad is stronger than good", and the title was the finding. Across everyday events, close relationships, feedback, first impressions and learning, bad had more impact than good. Bad information was processed more thoroughly. Bad impressions formed faster and were harder to shift. They found almost no exceptions. I should say that both papers are reviews

rather than single experiments, and a later critic argued the picture is less uniform than the reviews suggest. But the broad pattern is well established and I don't know anyone who studies this who disputes it.

So here's what happens in the kitchen. The pan is one fault and the table, the post and the bag are three fines. By count the evening is three to one in favour of fine. But the pan weighs more than any of the three, and when the four are put together in your mind, the result comes out worse than the sum, because that's what mixing does. You walk in and the evening feels like a pan. The fines didn't register, and even if they had, they'd have been outweighed.

That means the record the scan keeps is unbalanced twice. Once by count, because the fine sends no signal and doesn't get counted. And once by weight, because what does get counted on the fault side feels heavier than it is. When you say you only mention what matters, you're reporting the weights honestly. It's the weights that are off.

I'm not saying the pan doesn't matter. It should be washed. I'm saying that "the pan matters and the table doesn't" is a sentence produced by a mind that weighs faults heavily, and that the same evening, seen by someone whose weights were level, would look like a cleared table with a pan in it.

"I'm being realistic"

The third belief follows from the first two, and it's the one I'd most like to shift, because it's the one that feels like a virtue. You'd say you're realistic. Other people see a lovely evening. You see the evening as it is, with its faults in it.

Consider what a realistic report of the kitchen would contain. Table cleared and laid. Post sorted. School bag ready. Pan on the hob. Four items, one of them a fault. That's the realistic report. The report the scan gives is one item long. It's not more realistic than the four-item version. It's less. It's a report with three-quarters of the evening left out.

The same is true of the quarterly report. A realistic assessment is that it's forty-one pages of careful work with one wrong total. What you said was that the total is wrong. True, and a quarter of the truth. Your daughter's homework is eighteen right and two wrong, and what she heard was two wrong.

I think the word realistic has been doing a job it isn't fit for. It's been standing in for "willing to see faults", and those aren't the same. Someone who only sees faults is exactly as unrealistic as someone who only sees what's fine. They've each got half the picture. The difference is that the fault-only person feels rigorous, and the fine-only person feels naive, and neither feeling is evidence.

Look at the count from chapter 1, if you did it. Say the first column came to fifteen and the second to two. The question isn't whether the fifteen faults were real. They probably were. The question is whether the day contained fifteen faults and two fines, and you know it didn't. The day contained several hundred things that went as they should. Meals happened, people turned up, the work got done, the car started. Fifteen to two is a count of what rang, not of what happened.

If you want to be realistic, and I think you do, the job is to get the fine into the record. Not instead of the faults. Alongside them, at something closer to their true proportion. This will feel, for a while, like going soft. It isn't. It's correcting a count that was wrong.

"If I don't say anything, it means it's fine"

Now for the people around you, because so far this has been about your record, and they don't live in your record. They live in what you say.

You might hold, without ever having put it into words, a rule that silence is approval. You mention what's wrong. If you haven't mentioned something, it's because it was fine, and everyone knows that. Your partner knows you noticed the table, because you'd have said something if you hadn't. Your colleague knows the other forty pages were good, because you only raised the total.

I want to test that against what the other person actually receives. Your partner receives a remark about the pan. That's the whole transmission. There is no second message saying "and the table was noticed and approved of". You may feel that message, but a felt message doesn't cross the room. What crosses the room is the pan. Your colleague receives one sentence about page four. The forty pages produced silence, and silence isn't a message with content. It's the absence of one, and people fill absences with whatever they're already inclined to believe.

So what do they conclude? It depends on the person, and on how long they've lived with the commentary. Early on, they might give you the benefit of the doubt. Over months, most people settle on one of two readings. Either you didn't notice the fine, in which case what they do is invisible to you, or you noticed and didn't think it

worth saying, in which case it's worth nothing. Neither reading is what you intend. Both are reasonable, given the evidence they've got, which is the fault list and nothing else.

This is the part that I think readers of this book find hardest, so I'll say it plainly. From where the other person stands, you are the sum of your remarks. They can't see your standards or your care or the silent approval. They can only hear what you say, and what you say is faults. To them, you're a person who notices faults. That's not a misreading. It's an accurate reading of the only data you've given them.

The "you're welcome for the table" your partner said to nobody was that reading, spoken aloud. It wasn't a sulk. It was a report on what it's like to have cleared a table for someone whose only remark was the pan. And the thing to notice is that it came as a surprise to you, because in your version of the evening the table had been seen. It hadn't. Not in any way that reached them.

"They know I appreciate them"

The next belief is that the appreciation is there and the people around you can see it. You don't say thank you for the table because your partner knows. Of course they know. You've been together for years. You'd be embarrassed to spell it out, and they'd be embarrassed to hear it.

Amit Kumar and Nicholas Epley, two psychologists who study how people misjudge social situations, ran three experiments on exactly this and published them in 2018. They had participants write a letter of thanks to someone who'd done something for them, and then predict how the recipient would feel. How surprised. How happy. How awkward. The letters were sent, and the recipients reported how they actually felt.

The writers got it wrong in a consistent direction. They underestimated how surprised the recipients would be about what they were being thanked for. They underestimated how good the recipients would feel. And they overestimated how awkward it would be. In the same study, the writers' expectations of awkwardness and mood were linked to how willing they were to express thanks at all. The people who thought it would be awkward and land flat were the people who didn't do it.

I think there are two things in that finding, and both matter here. The first is that recipients were surprised. Not surprised to be thanked, exactly, but surprised by what for. The letter told them that something they'd done had been noticed and had mattered,

and they hadn't known. That's the "they know" belief tested and failed. The people being thanked did not know. They'd been carrying on with no idea that anything they did had registered.

The second is that the gap runs the same way for everyone. It's not that some people are bad at guessing. The writers as a group expected less pleasure and more awkwardness than there was. If you feel sure your partner knows, and sure that saying so would be strange, you're feeling what those participants felt before they sent the letters, and they were wrong.

The study used letters, and I'm extending it to something said in a kitchen. I think the extension holds, because the mistake is about how the other person feels and not about the medium, but I should say that it's my extension.

Here's the plain version. Your appreciation is inside you, where they can't see it. What they can see is the commentary. If you want them to know, the appreciation has to leave your head and cross the room, and the only vehicle it's got is words. They can't read it off you. Nobody can. And when it does cross the room, it lands better than you expect.

"Praise makes people slack"

This is the belief that keeps the scan in charge at work, and often at home too. If you start saying things are fine, people will think they've arrived. Standards will slide. The reason the report is good is that your colleague knows you'll find the wrong total. Thank them for the forty pages and next quarter it'll be thirty-eight.

Let me separate two things that this belief runs together. One is the standard, which is what counts as good enough. The other is the commentary, which is what you say. The belief assumes that the standard is held up by the commentary, so that if you stop commenting on faults, or start commenting on the fine, the standard drops.

But the standard lives in the fault list, and this book isn't asking you to throw the fault list away. The wrong total still gets raised. The two crosses on the homework still get looked at. What changes is that the fine gets said as well. The report is still held to forty-one right pages, and you're now telling your colleague which forty are right, which is more information about the standard than they had before, not less.

There's also a question about what thanks does to the person who gets it, and here there's some evidence. Kumar and Epley followed the 2018 work with a series of experiments, published in 2023, on small acts of kindness. Giving away a hot drink in a park, a small gift in the lab. The givers again underestimated how good the recipients would feel. The part that's relevant here is the last experiment, in which givers also underestimated what recipients

would go on to do. Recipients of a kindness were more generous to a third person afterwards than the givers expected. The good act got passed on.

I'd be careful with that. It's a lab result about strangers and small gifts, and it doesn't say that thanking your colleague will make them work harder. What it does say is that the effect of a kind act on the person receiving it is larger than the person doing it expects, and that it moves what they do as well as how they feel. My own reading is that people repeat what's noticed. If the only things you notice are faults, the only thing your commentary can teach is which faults to avoid. If you notice the fine as well, the commentary can also teach which things to keep doing, and that's the half of the lesson that's been missing.

The word praise is part of the problem, and I'd drop it. Praise is a grade. It says "well done", it comes from above, and it can, I agree, be cheapened by being handed out for nothing. Thanks isn't a grade. It says "I saw that and it mattered to me", and it can only be cheapened by not being true. If the table was laid, thanking someone for laying it isn't going soft on standards. It's reporting a fact that you'd previously left out.

"It would sound fake"

Even granting all of that, there's the moment itself. You imagine saying "thanks for laying the table" and it sounds ridiculous. Stilted. Like something from a training course. Your partner would look at you as though you'd been replaced.

Two things about that. The first is that the feeling you're having is the forecast Kumar and Epley measured. Expected awkwardness. The writers in their experiments expected awkwardness too, and the recipients, on the whole, didn't feel it. The awkwardness is real, but it's yours, it's in advance, and it doesn't cross the room with the words. What crosses the room is the content, and the content is that someone noticed.

The second is about what makes something sound fake, and I think it's vagueness. "You're wonderful" sounds fake because it's a verdict with nothing under it. "Thanks for sorting the post, I'd been dreading that pile" doesn't sound fake, because it's about a pile of post that was there and isn't now. Specific thanks can't be performed. It can only be said if you saw the thing, and the seeing is what the other person is responding to. They're not being told they're wonderful. They're being told the post was noticed.

There's a small study that speaks to what a thanks does to the person hearing it. Lisa Williams and Monica Bartlett, in 2015, had participants receive a note from someone they'd never met, either with a line of thanks for a favour they'd done or without. Then they measured whether participants would give the stranger their contact details to carry on the relationship. Those who'd been

thanked were more likely to. The path ran through warmth. The note of thanks made its writer seem friendlier and more thoughtful, and that's what made people want to keep in touch. It's one study with a modest sample, so hold it lightly. But it fits the larger pattern. Thanks doesn't read as performance to the person receiving it. It reads as warmth, and warmth from you is something the people around you may not have had much of, however much of it you feel.

So yes, the first few times will feel odd to you. Say it anyway, keep it short, keep it specific, and watch what happens on the other face rather than in your own chest. The evidence says the other face is where the truth of it is.

"Thanks is for big things"

You might accept everything so far and still feel that the scale is wrong. You'd thank someone for a kidney. You'd thank them for taking a week off work to help you move. Laying a table? That's Tuesday. Nobody needs thanking for Tuesday.

Go back to chapter 3 for a moment. What's fine gets filed, and once filed it's not looked at. Wilson and Gilbert's model says we stop attending to what we've explained. A laid table is explained a thousand times over. It's been filed so long that it isn't a thing any more. It's the background against which the pan appears.

Kennon Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky tested a related idea with four hundred and eighty-one students over three months, in 2012. They asked what happens to the happiness from a good change in someone's life, and found the usual answer, which is that it fades. It fades by two routes. The good feelings from the change decline, and the person's expectations rise, so that what was a gain becomes the new floor. Then they looked at what slows the fading. Two things did. Continued appreciation of the change, and continued variety in how it was experienced. The students who kept noticing the good change kept more of what it gave them.

Those were students and a single positive change, and I'm reaching from that to a laid table on a Tuesday. It's my extension, and it's this. Everything fine in your life was once a change. The first time your partner laid the table without being asked, it was noticed. The first time your colleague handed in something that needed no rewriting, it was noticed. Then it happened again, and again, and

became the floor, and now the only thing that shows above the floor is the pan. The fine hasn't gone anywhere. It's become invisible by repetition, and the way to keep it visible is to keep naming it.

That's why small and often is the whole point, and not a lesser version of the real thing. Big thanks for big things happens on its own. Nobody needs a book to thank the person who helped them move. What nobody does on their own is thank the person for Tuesday, and Tuesday is where they live. It's where you live too. If the fine in your life is only visible when it's new, then most of your life is invisible to you, and you're walking around in a house made of pans.

"But some of it isn't fine"

There's an objection that comes from the honest end of the reader, and I want to take it seriously. Some of what you notice really is wrong. The pan does need washing. The total is wrong. If the book is asking you to say thanks instead, then it's asking you to pretend, and you won't.

It isn't asking that. You don't thank the pan. Nothing in this book requires you to say a wrong total is right or to smile at a thing that needs fixing. The fault list stays. What the book asks is that you keep two lists rather than one.

The first list is faults, and it goes on being a list of faults. Later, in chapter 20, I'll suggest running it through a couple of questions before you read it out, but nothing on it gets renamed. The second list is what's fine, and until now it hasn't existed. That's the change. Not a swap, an addition.

I think the pretending objection comes from imagining that the two lists compete, so that saying thanks for the table somehow costs you the right to mention the pan. It doesn't. You can say "thanks for doing the table" when you walk in, and "the pan's still there" ten minutes later, and both are true. What changes is that your partner hears two true things instead of one, and the two together are a fair report of the evening, which the one wasn't.

If anything, the second list makes the first more usable. A fault mentioned by someone who also mentions the fine is heard as information. The same fault from someone who only ever

mentions faults is heard as the weather, and people stop listening to weather. If you want the wrong total taken seriously, the forty right pages are your best route to it.

So keep your honesty. It's the thing that makes you worth listening to. Just apply it to the whole room.

"I don't want to turn into one of those people"

Under a lot of the objections so far there's a quieter one, and it's about who you'd be. You know the kind of person who says everything's lovely. Who thanks the waiter three times and tells the team they're amazing and posts about gratitude. You find them slightly exhausting and you don't entirely trust them, and you'd rather be the dry one who says the true thing. The book seems to be asking you to cross over.

It isn't, and I'd like to be precise about the difference, because I share your view of those people.

What you distrust in them isn't that they notice the fine. It's that they don't seem to notice anything else, so the fine has no weight. If everything is amazing, amazing means nothing. The dry person's remarks carry weight because they're rationed. That's a real asset, and I'm not asking you to give it up. I'm asking you to spend some of it on the other column.

Think about what a thanks from you would be worth, given who you are. You're the person who notices the wrong total. Everyone knows it. When you say "the north region section is really clear", your colleague knows you read it the way you read everything, looking for what's wrong, and found this instead. That's not the same sentence as the same words from the person who says it about every section. It's worth more, precisely because of the scan. Your reputation for spotting faults is what makes your fine believable, and the people who most need to hear a fine from someone are the people who've only ever heard faults from them.

So the person you'd become isn't the one you're picturing. You'd be the same dry, accurate, slightly hard-to-please person you are now, who also, once or twice a day, says a specific true thing about what went right. Nobody will mistake that for the waiter-thanker. They'll notice that your standards haven't moved and that your account of them has got fairer, and I think most of them will like you more for it without being able to say why.

There's one more thing under this objection, and it's that saying the fine feels like a loss of position. The dry one is a little above the room. Thanks puts you level with the person you're thanking. I'd only say that being level with your partner and your daughter and your colleague is where you'd want to be, if you thought about it, and that the height was never doing much for you.

"So I should keep a gratitude journal"

Somewhere around here a reader who's heard of this before will think of the notebook. Three things you're grateful for, written down each night. It's the standard advice, and you may have tried it and felt nothing, or found it saccharine, or done it for a week and stopped.

I'm not going to recommend it, and I'd rather tell you why than skip it.

The research behind it is real but smaller than its reputation. Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough ran the first studies in 2003. People were assigned to list things they were grateful for, or hassles, or neutral events, weekly or daily for some weeks, and the gratitude groups did better on several measures of wellbeing, though not all. The most reliable effect was on positive mood. A meta-analysis by Don Davis and colleagues in 2016 pulled together the studies since. Gratitude exercises beat doing nothing on wellbeing, with a modest effect. They beat a filler activity by a smaller one. And against a comparison that was itself designed to help, they did no better at all. The authors were honest about this. The exercises work a little, roughly as well as other active things a person might do, and not more.

So the notebook isn't nothing. But it's not the lever, and I think there's a reason it isn't. It's private. You write "the table" in a notebook and the table is noticed, but only by you. Nothing crosses the room.

There's a study that separates the two. Nathaniel Lambert and four colleagues, in 2010, looked at what expressing gratitude to a partner does to the person expressing it. In two surveys, people who told their partner what they were grateful for saw the relationship as stronger, and the expressing predicted that view rising over time. In the experiment, people were assigned for three weeks either to express gratitude to a friend, or to think grateful thoughts about the friend, or to think about daily activities, or to have positive interactions with the friend. At the end, the expressers saw the friendship as stronger than every other group, including the group that had only thought grateful thoughts. The measure was the expresser's own sense of the relationship, so it's a finding about how saying it changed the sayer. But it was the saying that did it, not the thinking.

That's why this book is about the thanks and not the notebook. The NHS, in its list of steps for mental wellbeing, puts "saying thank you to someone for something they have done for you" under giving to others, and I think that's the right category. It's not something you do for your mood, though your mood may benefit. It's something you do to another person, and it only works if it reaches them.

If the notebook helps you see the fine, keep it. Then say what's in it to the person it's about.

"It's how I was raised"

A lot of readers will recognise the scan from a parent. There was someone in the house whose attention worked this way, and you learned that this is what a capable adult looks like. Nothing fine was ever said. A good school report got "what happened in geography?" A tidy room got a comment about the one thing on the floor. And you turned out fine, or better than fine, so the method must have worked.

I'd like to separate two things again. One is whether you turned out capable, and I'll take your word for it. The other is whether the commentary is what made you capable, and I don't think you know that. You can't run your childhood again with the fine said out loud and see whether you'd have been less careful. What you can do is remember what it felt like.

Most readers, asked to, remember it clearly. The report held up for its one flaw. The feeling of having done eighteen things right and being asked about two. The slow lesson that nothing you did would be mentioned unless it was wrong, so that after a while you stopped showing things, or showed them braced. If that's your memory, then you have the best evidence anyone could have about what the commentary does to the person under it, and the evidence is that it didn't feel like care. It felt like being watched for mistakes.

The scan was learned. That's the point of this chapter, and it's good news, because learned things can be added to. You learned to look where the ringing was because that's where the adult in the room

looked. You didn't learn to look at the table because nobody in that house looked at the table. The second look was never modelled, so you never picked it up. That's not character. It's an omission in your training, and omissions can be filled in at any age.

Nothing here requires you to think badly of the person who raised you. They were almost certainly raised the same way, by someone who was raised the same way. The scan runs in families because it's the only kind of attention that gets demonstrated. You can be the place where the second kind starts.

"I'm the only one holding this together"

There's a feeling that goes with the scan, and it's worth naming because it feels like a fact. The feeling is that you're the only one who cares. You're the one who sees the pan. You're the one who catches the total. If you didn't, nobody would, and the whole thing would slide.

I want to suggest that this feeling is manufactured by the scan itself, and that it would arise in anyone whose attention worked this way, whatever the people around them were actually doing.

Here's how. Your own effort is visible to you, in full. You know about every pan you washed, because you were there, washing it. Other people's effort is visible to you only when it fails, because that's when it sends a signal. The table your partner laid didn't ring, so it wasn't counted. The pan they didn't wash rang, so it was. Over a year, your ledger shows your own work in full and other people's work only where it went wrong. Of course it looks as though you're holding it together alone. The ledger was kept by a method that can't see anyone else's contribution.

This is my reading and not a finding, but I think it explains something that otherwise looks like a puzzle. The people who feel most alone in holding a household or a team together are often surrounded by people who are, in fact, doing a great deal. And those people, in turn, feel that nothing they do is seen, which is the "you're welcome for the table" again. Both sides are reading the same ledger. One side kept it and the other side is in it.

A fair count would show something different. Try it for a week, if you're willing. Each evening, list what other people in your house or your team did that went as it should. Not what they did wrong, and not what you did. Just the fine, from the others. You'll have to go looking, because none of it rang. Most people who do this find a longer list than they expected and feel, at the end of the week, less alone, without anything about the household having changed. The household was always like that. The ledger wasn't.

What the scan costs you

I've been arguing about accuracy, and I think that argument is enough. But it's worth being plain about what the habit costs, because you're paying, and some of the bill lands on you.

The first cost is that you live in a house made of faults. If the fine is invisible and the faults ring, then the home you come back to each evening is, to your attention, a list of things that are wrong with it. Not because it is. Because that's all your attention shows you. People with this habit often describe their home, or their job, or their relationship as tiring in a way they can't account for, and I think part of the tiredness is that they're only ever shown the broken parts.

The second is mood, and here the notebook studies do speak. The most reliable effect of deliberately noticing the fine was on positive mood. Turn that around. A person who deliberately, if unknowingly, notices only faults is running the hassles condition of that experiment, every day, for years. I wouldn't put a number on what that does, but I'd expect the sign to be negative.

The third is what it does to how you see the people closest to you. Lambert's study found that expressing thanks raised the expresser's own sense of the relationship's strength. Run that in reverse. Years of expressing only faults, to a partner or a friend, and never expressing the fine, and you'd expect the expresser's sense of the relationship to sink, whatever the other person was actually doing. You'd come to see your partner as someone who

leaves pans out, because that's the only thing you've ever said about them. They'd become, in your account of them, the sum of the commentary.

The fourth is the fading in chapter 10. If the fine goes invisible unless it's appreciated, and you never appreciate it, then you've lost it. The good things in your life are still happening and you've stopped being able to feel them. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky's students who didn't keep appreciating the change lost most of what it gave them within three months. You've had longer.

The fifth is that people stop trying. Not all of them and not at once. But a person whose fine is never seen will, sooner or later, stop producing it for you. The colleague who used to send drafts early, so you could look at them, now sends them at the deadline, because early only ever bought them an earlier list of faults. Your daughter shows her homework to the other parent. Your partner does the table, still, but doesn't mention it, and one day doesn't do it, and you notice that, of course.

And the last is the version of you they know. You know yourself as someone with standards who cares. They know a person who notices what's wrong. That's the version at the dinner table and at the meeting and in your daughter's memory of being ten, and it's the version that will be described when you're not there. It isn't who you are. It's who the commentary has been, and the commentary is the only part of you they can hear.

What it costs them

The people around you are paying too, and I'd like to spend a chapter on them, because the scan makes it hard to see them at all.

Start with what it's like to live under commentary. Every day, the things you do that go right produce nothing, and the things that go wrong produce a remark. After a while you learn what you are to this person. You're a source of faults. It doesn't matter that they'd deny it. What they say is faults, and you're a reasonable person drawing a reasonable conclusion from the evidence. Some people fight this. Most go quiet, and do a little less, and keep their good work for people who see it.

A child learns something specific. Your daughter, with her two crosses, learns that eighteen right answers are nothing and two wrong ones are what her parent looks at. She also learns how attention works, because she's watching you, and she may take the scan into her own house one day. I said in chapter 14 that it runs in families because it's the only kind of attention that gets demonstrated. This is where the demonstrating happens. She's ten and she's learning it now.

A partner learns that the table doesn't count. I'd go further. A partner learns that they don't count, in the ordinary daily way that people need to, and the "you're welcome" was a request to count, made in the only tone left. Kumar and Epley's recipients were surprised by what they were thanked for because they'd had no idea it had been noticed. Your partner has no idea either. They've been laying that table into silence for years.

A colleague learns to send work late and to defend it, because sending it early only ever produced faults sooner. Then you notice that they're defensive, and that goes on the list.

There's one more person under the scan, and it's you. I said in the preface that the scan turned inwards has its own book, and it does, but it's worth a paragraph here because the two habits are usually the same habit. If your attention goes to faults, it goes to your own too, and most readers of this book will recognise a running list of what they got wrong today, with nothing on the other side. The same correction applies. Your own fine goes unrecorded by the same method, and the day you spent doing several hundred things right ends with the two you didn't. I'm not going to develop that here, but if it's the larger part of the problem for you, the book in the notes is the one to read next.

All of this is the cost of one thing, which is that half the record never gets spoken. Nobody set out to make a child brace before showing her homework. It's what happens when the only remarks are the ones that ring.

Seeing what's fine

The last few chapters have been the argument. The next three are the method, and the method has two parts. Seeing the fine, and saying it. This chapter is the seeing.

The fine doesn't ring, so you have to go looking. This is the whole difficulty and the whole method. You'll never notice the table the way you notice the pan, because the table sends no signal and never will. You have to turn and look at it on purpose. That sounds like effort, and for the first few weeks it is, but it's a small effort with a definite shape, which is more than most changes offer.

The walk-in question. Pick the moments when the scan runs hardest. For most people it's walking into a room, opening a piece of work, and the first minute of seeing someone. At those moments, before you say anything, ask one question. "What's fine here?" Not what's good, not what's wonderful, just what's fine. What's as it should be. In the kitchen, the table, the post, the bag. You'll have to look past the pan to find them, and looking past the pan is the skill.

Three places a day. Don't try to see all the fine all the time. You'll fail and stop. Pick three moments, the same three each day for a fortnight. Walking in from work. Sitting down to a meal. Opening the first piece of someone else's work. At those three, ask the question and find one thing. One is enough. The point isn't a full inventory. It's to build the second look until it runs on its own, and three repetitions a day is how looks get built.

It's a look, not a list. I've suggested counting in chapters 1 and 15 because counting shows you the gap. But the method isn't a ledger. It's a habit of turning your head. Once you've seen the table, you've done this part. What you do next is the next chapter.

Expect it to feel like nothing. The pan comes with a small charge, a flicker of something, and that's what tells you it's there. The table comes with no charge at all. Seeing it will feel flat, as though you've noticed something that doesn't matter. That's the filing from chapter 3 doing its work. Notice the flatness and see the table anyway. The charge isn't a measure of what matters. It's a measure of what's unexplained.

When you can't find anything. Some rooms really are a mess and some pieces of work really are poor. Even then, ask the question. The answer might be that the person turned up, or tried, or got the first half right. If there's truly nothing, say nothing about the fine. Don't invent it. The method needs the second list to be as honest as the first, or the first will stop being believed.

Saying it now

Once you've seen the fine, say it. This is the part that reaches the other person, and it's the only part that does.

To the person. Not to the room, not to a third party later, not in your head. To the one who did it, looking at them.

Now. At the time, in the moment you see it. Not saved up for a card or an anniversary or the moment they threaten to leave. The thanks that lands is the one that comes with the thing it's about still in view. "Thanks for laying the table" while the table is laid. A thanks delivered a week later is a different thing, still worth doing, but it doesn't correct the record in the moment the record is being made, and the moment is where the commentary lives.

Specific. Name the thing. "Thanks for sorting the post." "The section on the north region is really clear." "Eighteen out of twenty, and you got the fractions ones." Specific thanks can't be faked, because you can only say it if you saw the thing, and the seeing is what the other person is responding to. General thanks, "you're great", "thanks for everything", asks them to take your word for it. Specific thanks shows them the evidence.

Short. One sentence, two at most. A speech about how much you value them turns thanks into an occasion, and occasions are awkward. A sentence isn't. The awkwardness you're forecasting comes mostly from imagining a speech. Don't give one.

No "but". "Thanks for laying the table, but the pan's still there" is not a thanks. It's a fault with a run-up. The other person hears the pan and learns to brace when they hear the word thanks. If the pan needs mentioning, mention it later, in a separate sentence, ten minutes on. The two lists stay separate in speech as well as in your head.

No "finally". "Oh, you did the table, finally" is a fault dressed as a fine. So is "about time". So is "see, you can do it". If a fine is worth saying, it's worth saying without the sting, and if you can't say it without the sting, say nothing and come back to it when you can.

No comparison. "Thanks for the table, that's more than your brother ever does" makes the thanks about someone else, and the person in front of you learns that they're being ranked. Just the thing, just them.

Out loud. Thinking it doesn't cross the room. Lambert's experiment found that thinking grateful thoughts about a friend did less for the thinker than saying them to the friend did, and for the friend it did nothing at all, because the friend never heard. If you can't manage out loud yet, a text is a start. "Just saw the post is sorted, thanks." It's a poor second to a face, but it crosses the room.

The first week. It will feel strange to you. Chapter 9 said why, and the evidence says the strangeness is yours and stays on your side of the room. The other person may look surprised, and the surprise is the point. They didn't know. If they say "what's brought this on?", the honest answer is fine. "I noticed I only ever mention what's wrong, and I'm trying to mention the rest." Most people, told that, will help you.

Keeping the fault list honest

The fault list stays, and nothing in this book renames a fault. But once the second list exists, the first can be looked at with a little more care, because it's no longer carrying the whole conversation.

Does it need saying? Some faults do. The wrong total needs saying, because it'll go to the board otherwise. The pan needs washing but doesn't necessarily need saying, because you could wash it, or leave it for whoever cooks next, or say it tomorrow. A useful test is whether saying it changes anything. If the remark leads to a fix, it's information. If it leads to nothing but the other person knowing you noticed, it's commentary, and commentary is what this book is about reducing.

To whom? If your daughter got two wrong, she's the one to tell, and she's ten, and she'll learn more from being shown the two than from being told about them. If a colleague's total is wrong, tell the colleague, not the meeting.

When? Not in the same breath as the thanks. Not as the first thing on walking in. Not at bedtime. Faults land best when the other person isn't already braced, and the way to have people not braced is to have spent the previous week saying what was fine.

Fix it or drop it. For the small ones, the pan-sized ones, there are two honest responses. Fix it, in which case it's done and there's nothing to say. Or drop it, in which case it's left and there's nothing

to say. The third option, leave it and mention it, is the one that costs the most and does the least, and it's the one the scan reaches for by default.

This isn't a ratio. You may have heard that there's a right number of fines per fault, five to one or some such. I'm not going to give you one. The ratios that get quoted come from research that's been disputed, and in any case a target turns thanks into bookkeeping. The aim is simpler. Every fine you see gets said, and every fault you see gets the three questions. The proportion will look after itself, and it'll look like the room.

Some things aren't faults. A fair number of what the scan flags are differences, not faults. The dishwasher stacked a different way. A paragraph written in a style you wouldn't use. The child's room tidied by the child's idea of tidy. Before a difference goes on the fault list, ask whether it's wrong or just not yours. A great deal of commentary is a person's preferences read out as standards, and the people hearing it can tell the difference even when the person saying it can't.

The decision

You've now got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to be one sentence, so that you can carry it into a kitchen without a book in your hand.

When I notice something's fine, I say so to the person, now, and specifically. When I notice something's wrong, I decide whether it needs saying before I say it.

That's the rule. It has four parts, and it's worth being clear about each before you start, because a rule that's fuzzy at the edges gets abandoned at the first edge.

The first part is the second look. Three moments a day, the walk-in question, one fine thing found. This is the part that takes effort, and it's the part that everything else depends on. Without the look, there's nothing to say.

The second is the saying. To the person, now, specific, short, out loud. No "but", no "finally", no comparison. One sentence.

The third is the three questions before a fault. Does it need saying, to whom, when. Fix it or drop it for the small ones. Differences aren't faults.

The fourth is the separation. The two lists never share a sentence. Thanks is thanks and a fault is a fault, and they're at least ten minutes apart.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When I walk in from work, before I say anything, I'll look for one thing that's fine and say it.

When I open someone's work, I'll find one thing that's good in it and say that first, and raise the faults separately.

When I notice a fault and I'm about to say it, I'll ask whether it needs saying, and if it's pan-sized I'll fix it or drop it.

Write them somewhere you'll see them. The fridge is traditional and it works.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first few days will feel artificial, and the fine will feel flat when you find it, as chapter 18 said. Around the end of the first week, someone will notice, and either ask what's going on or, more likely, say nothing and stand a little differently. By the second week, the walk-in question will start to run before you've asked it, at least sometimes. The fault list will get shorter on its own, not because you're suppressing it but because the three questions remove most of it. By a month, you'll have had at least one moment where you walked into a room and saw the table before the pan, and that moment is the habit changing. It won't be every time. It doesn't need to be.

Partners, children, colleagues, the person who never thanks you, and when it's more than a habit

The rule is the same everywhere, but the rooms are different, and it's worth a few words on each.

A partner. This is where the commentary has usually run longest and where the "you're welcome" was said. Start here if you can. The first specific thanks may get a suspicious look, because a partner who's lived under the scan for years has learned to hear a fault behind every opening. Keep it short and don't explain unless asked. If they say "what do you want?", the honest answer is "nothing, I just saw it". Expect it to take a few weeks before the thanks is heard as thanks. Chapter 6 says why. They've got years of evidence to update.

Children. The homework rule is to say the eighteen before the two, and to say them specifically. "You got all the fractions ones" is worth more than "well done", because it tells her what she can do. Then look at the two with her, as a thing to understand rather than a thing she got wrong. Children under the scan learn to hide their work. Children whose fine gets seen keep showing it, and that's the only way you'll get to help with the two.

At work. The report rule is the first good thing first, separately, and the wrong total after. If you manage people, this is most of what managing is, and the scan is the most common reason a capable manager is described as hard to work for. Keep the standard. Say the forty pages. Your colleague will send the next draft early again, and early is where you can still fix things.

Being thanked yourself. People with the scan often deflect thanks. "It was nothing." "Don't be silly." That's the same habit, turned round. Your own fine is unrecorded by the same method, and when someone else records it, you delete the entry. Try "you're welcome" instead, and let it stand. It's practice in the idea that fine things are worth saying.

The person who never thanks you. You may have one of these, and you may have picked up the scan from them. You can't make them say the fine, and this book isn't a way to get thanks back. Two things help. The first is to say your own thanks anyway, because the rule is about your record and not theirs. The second is chapter 6 in reverse. Their silence doesn't mean they haven't noticed. It might, but it might also mean they were raised in a house where the fine was never said, and that's most houses. If it matters to you to know, ask them, plainly, once.

Being the one under the scan. If you live or work with someone who runs the commentary on you, the reading of it in chapter 6 is worth having. Their remarks are a record of what rang, not a verdict on you, and the silence about your fine is an omission and not a judgement. That doesn't make it pleasant to live with. It does make it less personal. If their commentary has moved past faults into contempt, or you find yourself afraid of it, that's a different subject and not one this book covers.

Complaining. The scan has a cousin, which is complaining about things nobody in the room can fix. The weather, the council, the trains. It's the same attention going where the ringing is, and the same correction applies. Ask what's fine, and say that instead sometimes. But that's a book of its own and I'll leave it there.

When it's more than a habit. I said in the preface that if nothing has felt fine for a fortnight, that's health and not habit. The same applies if the scan has recently got much worse, or if you find you can't feel anything when you do see the table, week after week. Low mood makes the fine invisible in a way that no method reaches, and the NHS guide is that low mood or loss of pleasure lasting most of the day for two weeks is reason to see a GP. Go. The book will still be here.

Slips. You'll walk in one evening and say "the pan's still there" before you've looked at anything. Everyone does. It's not a sign the rule failed or that you didn't mean it. It's a scan that's been running for decades doing what it does. The response is the same as for any fault, which is to fix it. Look for the fine, now, and say it. "Sorry, that came out first. The table looks great." Then carry on. The rule is about the next room, not the last one.

The table was laid

It's half past six on a Tuesday, some weeks on. You've been thinking about the evening in the car, and the thought was the same as ever, mostly what still needs doing. You open the front door and walk into the kitchen. The pan is on the hob, with this morning's porridge on it. You see it first. You always will.

Then you ask the question, because by now it asks itself about half the time and this is one of the times. What's fine here. The table is laid. The post is in its pile. The bag is by the door. You say, "Thanks for doing the table," and your partner, who is at the sink, says "That's all right," and there's nothing else in it. No surprise now. There was, the first few times. It's been a few weeks.

The pan is still there. You wash it. It takes a minute and there's nothing to say about it, so you don't.

Later, your daughter brings her homework. Twenty questions, three wrong this time. You look at the seventeen and find the ones with the long division, which she couldn't do last month, and you say so. Then you ask about the three, and she shows you, and one of them is a slip and two of them are the same thing not understood, and you sit down with that one thing. She doesn't put the book away.

At work, on Thursday, the report comes in two days before the deadline, which it hasn't for a while. You read it. The north region section is the clearest thing you've read all quarter and you say so, in a message, before you say anything else. There's a wrong total on

page six. You raise it an hour later, in a separate message, and it's fixed in ten minutes, and the colleague says "good catch", which they haven't said for a year.

None of this is a transformation. The scan is still running. The pan still rings and the table still doesn't. You still have standards and you still say the faults that need saying. The difference is that the record now has two columns, and the people around you can hear both, and the version of you they know has changed to something closer to the version you meant.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. Tomorrow, when you walk into a room, look for one thing that's fine, and say it to the person who did it, before you say anything else. That's the whole method, and everything else is detail.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't medical or psychological advice, and it's no substitute for a GP or a counsellor who knows you. The NHS guidance I mention is for England as I found it in September 2026.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20 and 23. The household, the pan, the report, the homework and the colleague are invented.

Before you start. The two-week guide for low mood and loss of pleasure is from the NHS pages on depression. The related habit, the scan turned on yourself, is the subject of an earlier book in this series, *You wouldn't say it to a friend*.

Chapter 3. Wilson and Gilbert, "Explaining away: a model of affective adaptation", *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, 2008, pages 370 to 386. This is a theoretical model with some new tests on pleasant events, and the account of attention going to unexplained, self-relevant events is theirs. The application to a kitchen is mine.

Chapter 4. Rozin and Royzman, "Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, 2001, pages 296 to 320. Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs, "Bad is stronger than good", *Review of General Psychology* 5, 2001, pages 323 to 370. Both are reviews of many studies rather than single experiments. A critique published in 2018 argued that the evidence is less uniform than the reviews claim. The reading of the kitchen as a record unbalanced by count and by weight is mine.

Chapter 7. Kumar and Epley, "Undervaluing gratitude: expressers misunderstand the consequences of showing appreciation", *Psychological Science* 29, 2018, pages 1423 to 1435. Three experiments with written letters. The extension from letters to something said aloud is mine, and the chapter says so.

Chapter 8. Kumar and Epley, "A little good goes an unexpectedly long way: underestimating the positive impact of kindness on recipients", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 152, 2023, pages 236 to 252. Field and laboratory experiments with small kindnesses between strangers. The finding about recipients passing kindness on comes from the fourth experiment. The claim that people repeat what's noticed is my reading and not theirs.

Chapter 9. Kumar and Epley 2018 as above, for expected awkwardness. Williams and Bartlett, "Warm thanks: gratitude expression facilitates social affiliation in new relationships via perceived warmth", *Emotion* 15, 2015, pages 1 to 5. A single experiment with a modest sample and a written note, which the chapter says.

Chapter 10. Wilson and Gilbert as above. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, "The challenge of staying happier: testing the Hedonic Adaptation Prevention model", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, 2012, pages 670 to 680. Four hundred and eighty-one students followed for three months after a positive change. The reach from that to the ordinary fine in a household is mine, and the chapter says so.

Chapter 14. Emmons and McCullough, "Counting blessings versus burdens: an experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, 2003, pages 377 to 389. Davis and colleagues, "Thankful for the little things: a meta-analysis of gratitude interventions", *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, 2016, pages 20 to 31. The effect sizes I describe as modest and small were 0.31 against no treatment and 0.17 against a filler activity, with no difference against a comparison designed to help. Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham and Graham, "Benefits of expressing gratitude: expressing gratitude to a partner changes one's view of the relationship", *Psychological Science* 21, 2010, pages 574 to 580. The outcome was the expresser's perception of the relationship, which the chapter says. The NHS page is "5 steps to mental wellbeing".

Chapter 17. Emmons and McCullough, Lambert and colleagues, and Sheldon and Lyubomirsky as above. Running each of them in reverse, to say what the scan costs, is my reasoning and not something any of the papers tested.

Chapter 18. Kumar and Epley 2018 as above, for the recipients' surprise. Everything else in the chapter is my reasoning.

Chapter 20. Lambert and colleagues as above, for expressing against thinking. Kumar and Epley 2018 as above, for the first week. The method is mine.

Chapter 21. The disputed ratio I decline to give is the positivity ratio for couples and teams, which comes from work whose predictive claims have been challenged and which I haven't verified.

Chapter 22. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule and its parts haven't been tested together, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 23. The NHS pages on depression as above.