Science Societies

Thankfulness should occur every day

By Marilyn L. Warburton, David Clay, and Ron Turco

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Marilyn L. Warburton, David Clay, Ron Turco

We've just finished another successful Annual Meeting, and at the time that we are writing this column, we're turning our thoughts to Thanksgiving, the end of the semester, and the upcoming end-of-the-year holidays. While the purpose of the Thanksgiving holiday is right in the name, a more general question emerges regarding

thankfulness that goes beyond one day in November: Are we thankful for what we have, and how are we paying things forward for others?

None of us appeared complete in the form of the person we are today. Along our journey, we have had multiple interactions with people that took actions on our behalf that changed our direction and eventually led to where we stand now. If you think back, there is someone who gave you that first research job, telling you what an excellent research experience it would be. And even though you mostly washed dishes or watered pots or hoed weeds, you were fresh out of high school and working in a major research lab or field operation. Someone took a chance on you, and your trajectory changed.

The connection to where you are now and that small act will get lost and forgotten in time, but it changed you. As you traveled through your undergraduate program, you were given opportunities to develop fundamental skills that are still paying off today. As you moved through your time in school (and later in your career), you asked people for letters of recommendation, which require a significant amount of time to write. These letters can change your life; are you thankful to the people who supported you, and do you ever think about the impact that letter-writing act had on you?

Our Opportunities Made Possible By Others

The classes you took, the undergraduate research experiences you had, the internships and time spent watching someone else work in the lab where you washed dishes, the edits and comments on papers, and yes, the letter writers, all led you to the point where you were ready to apply for an open graduate student position, your first job, tenure or promotion, and each big chance and opportunity you have had or will have. When people offer you these chances, and take a chance on you, work hard but be thankful, and watch as your life course is altered significantly.



People who took a chance on us, such as giving us our first research experience, have helped change the trajectory of our lives. Here, University of Wisconsin–Green Bay (UWGB) graduate student Forrest Kalk and UWGB soil scientist Kevin Fermanich collect aggregate samples next to infiltration equipment in 2017 (their research is featured on pages 4-10 of this issue). Photo by Molly Meyers.

Our opportunity this year to serve as presidents of the SSSA, CSSA, and ASA was all made possible by someone who took a chance on us many years ago. SSSA President Ron Turco is thankful to Dr. Dave Bezdicek, who took that chance and let him work on rhizobium. CSSA President Marilyn Warburton is thankful to Dr. Merle Jensen, who hired an inexperienced undergraduate to maintain research plants in the greenhouse. ASA President David Clay was blessed with teachers, mentors, and friends who helped him learn how to live with dyslexia.

In the divided and rancorous world where we now operate, the simple act of realizing you have been moved and changed by so many others is essential. You currently work in a world dependent on people who volunteer their time to sit on grant review panels, chair committees, and review papers. These actions change the course of many people's lives. Are you thankful to these people? Are you one of these people?

It is critical to remember that few of us can make it to home plate on a single hit. Most of us have to work our way around the bases with the help of our teammates. Keep thankfulness in mind as you run from first to second base and as you round third and head home. More importantly, think about what you can do to help someone else by taking a chance on them to help change their trajectory or by being as active in supporting them as others have been for you.

What We Are Thankful For



All of your experiences, and the people who supported you through them, have led you to each big chance and opportunity you have had or will have in your life. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock/insta_photos.

As this is our final article as your presidents, we wish to thank the headquarters staff at the Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies (ACSESS) for working with us over the last year. They do a phenomenal job of keeping our three Societies working and responding to the critical issues facing our community. We have witnessed several significant changes over the last year. We are proud to have helped our Societies take responsibility for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues and feel we are on the way to making needed changes. We were honored to have the chance to help hire our dynamic new CEO, Jim Cudahy, who is doing a great job helping us to plan for the future. We are so pleased to have helped the Societies work and meet despite difficulties due to COVID restrictions. Our international meeting is now back and better than ever!

Finally, thank you for allowing us to be your presidents. We remain in debt to you, the members who trusted us to lead over the last year. We have had a chance to interact with a lot of great people and have learned much from this experience. While our roles as presidents are ending, we know we have great people taking over. We are truly thankful for this opportunity and look forward to other opportunities to serve the Societies, and interact with their great members, down the road.

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