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Stephen Wilbers: Don't forget the magic words

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How can I thank you? Let me count the ways.

I could . . . well, I could send you an e-mail. That would be quick and easy. Timely, too. But an e-mail doesn't require much effort on my part. You might not think me sufficiently grateful.

I could . . . let's see. I could reach into the depth and breadth and height of my soul and commit my thoughts to paper. Give you the old razzle-dazzle, the old hocus-pocus, a show that was so splendiferous it would make you vociferous.

I could write a letter that would make me a star, at least in your eyes, at least for the moment. I could put old griefs behind us with a few kind words, a little TLC.

I could think of you and what you had done for me, not contrive to turn my thank-you into an opportunity to advance my own interests. I could be genuine and sincere.

I could, for instance,

- **Make a specific reference** to what you had done, maybe quote something you had said or explain in detail the particular benefits of your contribution -- anything to move my letter beyond a generic "thank-you-very-much-I-really-really-mean-it" kind of thing.
- **Create a broader context** by linking your contribution to an overriding goal or mission so that you would feel part of a larger effort, a valued member of an important group or community.
- **Offer to do something in return**, anything really, big or small, that demonstrated that, like you, I could be thoughtful and generous with my time.
- **Include a personal note** about something we have in common, maybe refer to the experience that brought us together or mention one of your concerns or worries so that you would know I had paid attention to the things that were on your mind.
- **Conclude with a goodwill statement** that in some ways affirmed and reinforced our relationship -- something that says, "we have more good times ahead."

I could, on the other hand, give you the old hocus-pocus, the flimflam

flummox, a three-ring circus that would stun and stagger you. I could

- **Let more than one week pass** before writing and sending my letter so that you would think the only reason I was bothering at all was to fulfill a social obligation.
- **Include a request for additional assistance**, thereby saving me the trouble of a second communication.
- **Be self-congratulatory**, placing greater emphasis on what a fine job I was doing with whatever it was you did to help me accomplish my goal. What exactly did you do, anyway?
- **Say "thank you in advance"** in my complimentary close to a request letter, thus serving you notice that if you were more important I would take the time to thank you later but, being who you are, I'm finished with you now.

Whether my effort brought smiles or tears to your eyes, whether you thought it had rhyme or reason, was original or some odd translation from the Portuguese, I hope you would accept it in the spirit in which it was intended.

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