

# The Power of a Personal “Thank You”

By Vicki Wolfe

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A personal and sincere “thank you” is one of the most powerful recruitment tools available to blood centers. I have been granted an opportunity to view the blood services community in a particularly unique and valuable way. As a blood recipient, I hold blood donors in high esteem. As a community relations manager at BloodSource, I greatly value the work of others in our organization. I am a walking reminder that the work we do — every one of us throughout the center — saves lives. I would not be alive today if it were not for hundreds of generous people stepping up to donate very precious gifts of blood, platelets and plasma.

Young and healthy, the only thing I knew about leukemia back in the 1990s was gleaned through tear-jerker movies. I was utterly absorbed with my two little girls and all the trappings of normalcy — family life, a job, volunteering, athletic adventures and more. Persistent hip pain and odd bruising drove me to the doctor and a diagnosis of acute leukemia. Years passed and chemotherapy, infections, remission, relapse, a doomed pregnancy, arsenic, isolation, and 37 gallons of blood and blood components contributed to a whole new perspective on normalcy.

Eight years ago, advancing medical technologies, a matched family donor, a bone marrow transplant and blood donors gave me another chance at life. I did not see the faces of these blood donors, and I do not know their names, but their selfless actions carry me to this very day. When people walk into a blood center or



**VICKI WOLFE, shown at left with her bone marrow donor, brother Brian Wolfe, while undergoing treatment for acute leukemia, and, at right, eight years after her ordeal.**

sign up to donate blood at a mobile drive, they often do not realize the destination of their donation — the impact on hopes and dreams of a patient in need. Blood donors helped provide hope for a full life — a life that a 10 percent prognosis for recovery given to me at relapse did not begin to hint at — a life with birthdays and graduations, my daughters’ first dances and first boyfriends, new careers and college initiations, love and laughter in a million different ways. You can rest assured that I will continue to thank blood donors whenever and wherever opportunities arise. How can I not? Working at BloodSource gives me myriad opportunities to thank blood donors and the staff who do the work of bringing life-saving units to the hospital.

Blood recipients who work at blood centers bring a different perspective to the organization. I received hundreds of units of blood and blood components from three blood centers when I was ill. Blood

was available, and it was safe, despite ever-present challenges to blood centers, such as blood-borne viruses that still make me shudder if I delve too deep. I care about regulatory issues and quality assurance! I care that units of blood and plasma and platelets are at the hospital, ready to be transfused when needed. When meetings at work drift away from the all-important reality that a product from our blood center will be infused into a mom or dad, a neighbor, child, co-worker, a family member, any sick and vulnerable person — my mere presence in the room is testimony to diligent practices. Passion for the cause is in my blood, so to speak.

My blood recipient lens, coupled with a blood services perspective, expands how I communicate the need for a safe and plentiful blood supply. Being well aware of transfusion-related acute lung injury, West Nile virus, nucleic acid testing, bacterial detection and automated

collections makes it easier to connect the dots between mosquitoes, increasing fuel costs, traffic gridlock, foreign travel, wildfires, homeland security issues and blood collection concerns. As a blood drive chairperson, a grant writer, a speaker and a liaison to community groups, I bring a perspective that is different from the usual staff person. Yet, all of these roles pale next to the most important asset I bring to BloodSource and the issue of blood donation. That is, a deep sense of gratitude for those who choose to step out of their busy lives and donate blood — and a willingness to thank them for it.

I share my story frequently with donors and patients, with grantmakers, and with the media and community members;


my story is often included in newsletters and in promotional materials. The message is tailored to the specific audience and always includes a personal and sincere “thank you.” I am fully aware that my story is simply one story among thousands. The use of recipient stories has become a particularly helpful recruitment tool to remind blood donors of the importance of what they do. “Yes, you do save lives” is not merely a tag line to a BloodSource branding campaign — it is a reality. Our donors — long inured to tag lines, standard marketing and cold statistics — may forget that they do save lives if there is not a living, breathing human being who stands before them and says THANK YOU!

Blood centers can assist recruitment efforts by asking people who have received blood and blood products to share their stories. Start with your staff — every blood center in the country employs individuals with a personal connection to blood. Offer a personalized “thanks,” such as:

*“Thank you, I got to see my little girls grow up.”*

*“Thank you, I received a few more years with my dad because of your donations.”*

*“Thank you, my son is alive because of blood donors.”*

Sharing personal experiences with sincere gratitude is a small step toward helping promote the cause of blood donation. It is a powerful, inspirational and motivational recruitment tool. Personal stories have universal application because blood recipients — like many of you reading this article — never expected to be the ones in need. Not until we saw the tubing with that long red line of a precious gift coaxing us back to health did we truly understand. Blood recipients are the people who tell these stories far better than anyone else — and better yet if these individuals happen to be on staff. 

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