

# 122 - Gratitude with Kevin Monroe

**Kevin Monroe**

You don't express gratitude and appreciation and thanks to get people to do their best work. But one of the things you discover, when people feel seen, heard, valued and appreciated, they do great work. And they'll there they will be willing to go the extra mile because they feel a part of something significant.

**Gert Mellak**

Welcome back to SEO Leverage is episode 122. My name is Gert Mellak. And I'm really happy to welcome a special guest today, Kevin Monroe.

**Kevin Monroe**

Hello, Gert, thank you for inviting me today. This is going to be fun.

**Gert Mellak**

I'm absolutely sure it is because it's going to be a little bit of a different framing. Today we are talking a little bit more about personal development, we have had more than 100 episodes now on this podcast, very technical, very tactical, strategic, SEO focused, conversion focused, etc. And the funny thing is now it's been four years and a little bit more, that we have our agency here. And I see clients have been growing up, clients have been growing up to have bigger teams, now they have a different situation, you actually reminded me that we we're close to four years of COVID, four years past COVID started, which is definitely was one of the biggest shifts I have seen in the online world, of how we work, how we engage with each other, how we talk to each other. I haven't been in a in an in-person meeting, I think in years. And it feels like so distant already.

**Kevin Monroe**

Yeah. Wow. Well, yeah. Well, I'm excited to dive into this. When we were just talking a few moments ago, before you hit record, you told me the topic. And then I asked when is this going to air and it's airing right away. And March 13, 2020 is when the World Health Organization declared COVID as a global pandemic. And Gert, you know what I, I mean, we didn't realize at that moment that everything changed. But looking back, everything has changed in a four year period of time. I mean, the world is. And I think history will probably record the more significance of the changes than we realize living through it. But our world has changed and like you said, you haven't even been to an in-person meeting.

**Gert Mellak**

It's really impressive, really it's impressive. And obviously you're you're an expert in personal development, gratitude coach, consultant, a lot of experience, I really appreciate you taking the time here. The reason I actually reached out to you because I discovered you on LinkedIn, and there was a phrase on your website that really resonated with me and exactly over this period of

COVID, which was, 'Am I valued am I contributing, is my contribution valuable?', something along these lines. And I was like, 'Hey, this is exactly what I'm trying to bring across or trying to work on with my team.' We have 25 people remote team now. And it's obviously always a challenge because you don't know what, how we people really take their behind their screen, you might not even have a video call to check on Slack or do a zoom call here and there. I have a little bit of an idea based on their voice if they are in a good mood in a bad mood. It's like a very different framing we have right now, and a lot of my clients, listeners to this podcast have the same situation. They might have a small team, but still 100% remote probably. So I think the situation here and how people feel respected, valued, etc. is a really big challenge.

**Kevin Monroe**

I think it is. So two questions as we get started that, in you listening, I invite you to kind of think about this. This, the phrase that Gert mentioned was, 'I just believe everybody has this innate desire to feel seen, heard, valued and cared for or appreciated', whatever word you want to use there. I think in the workplace, it's more appreciated, but "Am I seen heard valued and appreciated?' And so that's one do you, to what degree are you aware that you process that feeling? So I'm gonna put you on the spot, Gert, do you think about that at some point, right?. Am I making a difference?

**Gert Mellak**

Yeah, absolutely, every day.

**Kevin Monroe**

Okay, then the second question. I didn't prepare you for this, but as you were giving the intro, I'm thinking one out. I wonder to what extent, you're in the SEO business, right? I mean, is that how you would describe, if somebody ask what business are you in? How would you answer that question?

**Gert Mellak**

SEO search, marketing, digital marketing yeah

**Kevin Monroe**

Okay, now I heard you, I think you said you have a team of 25, right? To what extent have you been aware that you're also in the people business?

**Gert Mellak**

I actually got made aware of this over the years, because when you start I started as a like a freelancer doing everything myself, started to bring in a team and I said, 'Hey, suddenly, I'm managing people. I'm not only managing tasks anymore, I'm actually managing people, I'm responsible'. I'm, they, I need to hold them accountable. They rely on me. There's a lot of,

**Gert Mellak**

a lot of additional dynamics coming in with this.

**Kevin Monroe**

Yeah, true. I mean, I think one of the things I recognize I learned from my dad, and I don't know if he ever said these words, exactly. But every business, every business is a people business. Every business is either relying on the 25 people that are part of your team, or the people that are your clients, your customers, your vendors, your suppliers. So even if you don't think of yourself primarily as a people business, I got a newsflash for you. To some extent, you're in the people business. And when you realize you're in the people business, and then all of a sudden, so the, the father of psychology, what was, what was his name? William James, William James said, the deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated. I mean, the way he said, it's a craving to be appreciated. And that's where I draw this from that deep within every person is this desire to be seen, heard, valued and appreciated? And if you're in the people business, and if you're in a leadership role, guess what? You're one of those people, that the people on your team are looking to, for it, to answer that question. And to the extent that you, you not, not just you Gert, but you listen to me, right, any of you that are dialed into this conversation at this moment, what just I invite you to think a moment, when was the last time you, you pause, whether this is some kind of informal feedback or formal feedback, but you just calls for it. Wow, what you did was amazing, the work you did on this project, we appreciate it. And you helped us achieve this level of result, you helped us complete a project on time or early or I leaned in, you know, the all of a sudden, the client gave some extra demands and, and I didn't, I push those on you and you rose to the occasion. If we, if we miss those opportunities, to celebrate those accomplishments to celebrate contribution, our people are wondering, right? And if people wonder that longing enough, do you care? Do you value and appreciate me? They're not, they're gonna stop doing their best work. Now, we don't do this. If you're in leadership, you don't do, you don't express gratitude and appreciation and thanks to get people to do their best work. But what are the things you discover? When people feel seen, heard, valued and appreciated, they do great work. And they'll, there they will be willing to go the extra mile because they feel a part of something significant.

**Gert Mellak**

It makes a lot of sense, actually on how we operate it. A few things I learned from my mentor as well was really around, making sure they know that job is safe. So depending on what culture you work with, this might be an even more important issue where you say hey, they, they really rely on his job in order to bring food on the table. So making sure they know that their job is safe, that they're in a safe position, that they're doing great work, there's no reason to get rid of somebody doing great work. There's a lot of connotations, I was not aware honestly a few years ago about how important the security aspect was for team members because I was mostly doing freelance work. I was responsible for myself and really relying on finding my clients etc. But just making sure that you take this in or did I'd take this aspect into account when I talk to my team or show them how long have I started to do individual one on one calls with, with everybody every couple of months. We just have like half an hour and talk whatever comes up, and it's the best way really to kind of appreciate certain achievements, certain progress and make progress. But then we have the team call as well, where I think it's even, even more important to show, 'Hey, everybody, look at this person that did an amazing job together with this other person to bring us forward.' So also that they didn't know that their position in front of

their peers, essentially, is like, it's sort of like, like a status elevation if you want or, or like this appreciation that you mentioned, but in front of the of the herd, as well, pretty much right?

**Kevin Monroe**

Yeah. Okay. So there are a couple of things. We're gonna jump into here, based on what you just said. But earlier, you you said something, and all of a sudden, I was like, wow, you know, a few months ago, six, eight months ago, the Gartner Group put out a report and it was called The Reinvented EVP, employee value proposition. What is it that employees are wanting from their work? What do they want from a work relationship in a work environment, and this is post COVID. And their beliefs aligns with what you and I, the world's changed, right? The world of work has changed what people want is different. And when you were just talking about this, here are five, they draw this in a wheel, five spokes of a wheel of things people want, they want deeper connections. They want radical flexibility. Now, I'm pretty sure radical flexibility happens easy for the people in your environment, right? I mean, that's one of the things that brings people to freelancing and remote work is radical flexibility. They also want personal growth, they want opportunities to learn new things, to to try something new, right? They want to grow, they want holistic well-being and they want shared purpose, they want to be a part of something that's making a difference in the world. Now, what's really interesting, and I didn't ask this, is our podcast totally audio? Or is there a video element that you have?

**Gert Mellak**

We are going to have video as well? Yeah.

**Kevin Monroe**

Okay, so there is a graphic, in this graphic. So there are these five spokes of a wheel. Now, what's fascinating is what they put on the outside of the wheel. And they use these five phrases. So for deeper connections, how an employee experiences this or expresses this, I feel understood, feel understood. For radical flexibility. I feel autonomous, or personal growth, I feel valued. For holistic, well being I feel cared for, for shared purpose, I feel invested. Now, Gert, what was, what one, what, what two words did you hear consistent in all five phrases?

**Gert Mellak**

Feeling?

**Kevin Monroe**

I feel right. It's personal.

**Gert Mellak**

Absolutely.

**Kevin Monroe**

When I saw this, and I was I was hosting a session for a group in an IT company, it was Amazon Web Services, their Latin American division, and their senior vice vice president of HR brought this in, I just talked about that, what what we opened with that people everywhere want to feel

seen, heard, valued and appreciated. And she said, 'May I share this, I had no idea what she was going to share?' She put this image on the screen. And when she did this, and when I saw those words, right, that this, what people, people are wondering, do I think I'm understood? I believe I'm understood, right now. What are they, it's a feeling. It's, I feel understood, I feel secure, right? I feel safe, what things you were talking about, I feel safe in my job. I feel that I have a future here. So that's a question. And one of the things in, in some of the conversations when you have these one-on-one conversations with team members, you could just ask some questions that open. Well, how are you feeling about your work, right? Where are you feeling that you're finding joy? Or where do you feel frustrated. Those are, but, but I just, I was so drawn, that the phrases used by the Gartner Group to express what people want, they want feelings, and the feelings understood, autonomous, valued, cared for and invest.

### **Gert Mellak**

I think this this actually resonates a lot again with you was something I had to actually learn over the years, a little bit of. Everybody is obviously selfish first, I would, I would say, naturally. Everybody needs to make sure they are cared for, and then their families etc. So this is where this I came comes in. But also this feeling just reminds of this emotional component, right? So we, we are very technically, it's like, everything is a process, everything is a machine, got really a machine that acts this way, we have to act that way. We ask the machine, what do you want, because then we give it to you pretty much it's, it's like very, I think my our environment is very technical, right? So it's very easy and especially in a remote environment where you don't see the facial expression of this person today, because they had a rough night with their baby, or something like this, I feel that this, this human aspect is very easy to forget in, in this remote setting that we have now. Because ultimately, we are all in touch, in our case, in Slack, we use chat text-based like chat, which is the primary means of communication on top of some video calls, etc. But it's just it works really well. But you're losing a lot. You only have the words you decide how you read them. There is no intonation, there is none and might be an emoji helping you out once in a while. But, but there's no, there's no emotional aspect, right? And in the end, you see a person not performing so well, a few days in a row and Monday, you really need to make sure you surge. I just had a situation today where it has reached out and say, 'I know something is going on because the performance is just not as it used to be.' And the response time are not the same. And you have different criteria, we have to learn how to figure out what's going on for a person potentially to open up a dialogue or give them like this, this space to talk about their problems, because in the text, chat is not as easy as saying, Hey, I'm really having a rough day like you would in an open office and what a day am I having, right?

### **Kevin Monroe**

Yeah, and what's going on? What are the things, what else is going on in your life? And what's really sad? Okay, so we kind of made this distinction pre pandemic, and the world's changed since then, you know, one of the things I think people have realized, and it was it was kind of foolish that we ever thought this but there are people that think this, that you can compartmentalize your life now, I will say, those of us that are males, we might find it easier to compartmentalize things. You know, I don't know if you've ever seen this, there are some talks out there. They're funny talks, humorous talks, when they're talking about relationships between

male and female. Guys brains are like waffles. They're all these neat little boxes. And women's brains are like spaghetti, everything's intertwined together. And a guy can be just, you know, we can compartmentalize ourselves, but but we really can't compartmentalize life completely. If things are spinning out of control in your family. And that could be because of the health or well being of a parent, or a grandparent or a child, a niece or a nephew where all of a sudden, you can't be unaffected by that, you're just not. In so the other part, going back to Gartner, and you picked up on the word, I love that the word, the Human Deal, right? So this whole idea, I also get involved in some conversations about the future of work, right? And what's happening with AI. And these things are all happening. And I don't believe it's one or the other, I just believe we're going to see a polarization, I believe we will see a lot of companies use technology to become much more human friendly, and human focused workplaces. And a lot of companies will use those same technologies to minimize the role of human contribution because they don't value people, so so it's not that it's not what the technology, how, it's not what the properties of technology, it's how we apply it and how we use it, right. And so I hope more leaders are leaning into technology, to free people to do the work that fascinates them to to free up people from doing mundane tasks that a machine could do, but allow them to do the creative task that they really want to do, things that excite them. So this becoming more human.

### **Kevin Monroe**

Now, there was one other thing that hit me that I want to make sure we bring into this conversation. There's an excellent book, it it was first written as a book as 'The Five Languages of Love' by Gary Chapman. And then some years later he entered into a partnership with an organizational psychologist and they rewrote this as The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace. And it's, it's fascinating. I'll just hit these real quickly because not everybody wants to be appreciated in the same way. It's a part of this is really valuable. If you're a leader, find out, discover the people that are on your team, what's their language of appreciation. So the five words of affirmation. Some people want to be praised, quality time, other people value, the gift of quality time mentoring, that that would be a huge gift to somebody who values that acts of service. Tangible gifts, and appropriate physical touch, high fives, you know, a hug or something but appropriate physical touch. All of that is interesting. And I, I tell this in the context, recently, I met a woman who's a researcher, and she's on a three person team. And they had just, I call it the case of the mysterious, the mysterious case of the purple air bud, earbuds, purple earbuds they weren't air pods, earbuds. One day, she receives a gift from Amazon, no gift receipt or anything, just a package of purple earbuds. I didn't order purple earbuds. I wonder what this is. And she finds out a colleague had received some pink earbuds. And they, you know, through Slack, they're chatting and found that, 'Oh I got this'. And then they remembered a few weeks back, their boss asked what's your favorite color? Ones pink, ones purple. And then the third member of the team was out of town. This was in New York City, he's out of town. And by the time he comes home, his package had been stolen. He never got his, whatever color his earbuds was, but the white. They, they's were the boss's favorite earbuds. And so he thought I want to show appreciation to the people on my team. So I'm going to find out what their favorite color is and I'm going to gift them my favorite earbuds in their favorite color. And none of the three even wanted them. The lady I was talking to said, 'I have a set, they're the best earbuds I've ever used earbuds, I've ever used. I don't want another one. She gave them to her mother.

So right here is what happens when you don't understand, the appreciation language of the people on your you give them a gift, that means something to you and it meant nothing to them. And the impact is lost. You're smiling, you're using something like this.

### **Gert Mellak**

I've definitely seen it, I can totally relate where that where the idea comes from it's is when when you have a team, you just want to make sure everybody feels valued, you do something that's actually really efficient, you try to make a personal effort and they actually make an effort and give them what I think that it's going to be a fit, and they're going to use it. And then it's not just not learning, I definitely had these examples, as well. But I like yours better. But it is interesting. And it's really, but it's actually really hard in a remote environment, I think to figure out this, this preference for appreciation. So I definitely could do just while you were talking, I was going through my, the last team conversations I had one-on-one, I absolutely know who would be a quality time person. An increase in salary wouldn't mean the same as talking about her privacy issues for half an hour with me, because she's got nobody to talk to. There is another person that definitely needs the, needs the monetary feedback. Whereas it's it's absolutely money that shows how much we appreciate this, this is all that accounts, and you have those different preferences. And then you have probably half of my people, I couldn't say even after a couple of years minimum that everybody has been around, I couldn't really say what their preferences is.

### **Kevin Monroe**

So but you could ask, right? You can just kind of we weave this into some conversations, or tell me about a time when you were recognized in itself real good, what happened? Right? What was done, and that's using a technique called Appreciative Inquiry, asking people to share a story about a high point experience. And people will go there, people will tell you, when did you feel really valued on a team before? Oh, and then you can extract from it, here's what they want. Here's how and how can I do that. And I love leaders that find this information out months in advance of needing it, not just the day that they're going to place an order, right? And then when somebody does something, you kind of know, and you go, Oh, here's what I could do. That would really be a remarkable act of gratitude to them and appreciate. And, you know, so I remember a time when I was first in the sales environment. I was the only married guy on the team, everybody else was young, single. And when we would have sales contests, there would be things for a night out at the club, right? And these kinds of, and I'm like, that's not really motivating me, what I would love would be a babysitter for a night and dinner with my wife. And my wife would love that. It's those kinds of things. So I know, we're probably drawing close to the end of our time. People want to be seen, heard, valued, and appreciate, you as their direct leader, and whatever role that is, you're the best poised and position to give that feedback to them. And when you let people know, and you express messages of thanks, appreciation, or gratitude, I call them tag messages, right? Thanks, appreciation or gratitude. You use Slack. Maybe you would, I know of teams that have created a gratitude channel on Slack. And maybe once a week, or in or sometimes more frequently, hey, what's the best thing that happened to somebody today, right? Let's just celebrate? Or what are you thankful for? What have you enjoyed? Any of these kinds of questions, that, those gives those little moments of breakthrough, these lifts, and people and it gives people 'feel good'. And then when you start

making that a part of your culture. The other thing I would share it when you host team meetings, I don't know what it's like in your, you know, you listening in your team meetings. I know most of the meetings I've been part of through the years, they usually start with what's going wrong right now. And we start with talking about the worst thing that's happened, the fire we're trying to put out, all of these things. What if instead, you just take a moment and go, 'Hey, what's the best thing that happened to us as a team, to you as an individual since we were together last, right? And you source, when you do that, there are a couple of things that happen. You source positive energy and when you source that positive energy, you're unleashing creativity so that when you come to address this problem that you need to address, there's a greater sense of possibility rather than doom and gloom. So some temps there.

### **Gert Mellak**

This is this is really great. I'm making and am taking a lot of notes, I'm definitely going to, to figure this a lot, I do enjoy a lot, the one-on-one time, I have moved with my team members, where it's necessarily, it's just nothing really matters like no task, whereas it's half an hour, we have to get maybe 20 minutes, and we are done. But it's like those, those off work check-ins that you would have at a coffee machine, probably if you're in a bigger office. I'm trying to trying to recreate this, I think team meetings for us is always making sure everybody's aware of where we're going. Because addressing problems in an, in a 25-person Zoom call is not my cup of tea. I think it was much, much, much smaller, smaller groups that can be more efficient, or even one-on-one or with a two or three people involved. We usually make sure everybody knows we're in a good place to have, with safe paying a lot of attention, I think to making sure everybody knows there are no issues coming up. We're not losing 10 clients in a row, which might obviously raise a lot of questions. We do a team training, so there's always one member of the team presenting something. So everybody learn something. And then we discuss it a little bit and and this is usually the team, the team call we do for right now,

### **Gert Mellak**

every week. But there's a lot of information in there that gets me thinking how we can frame this better.

### **Kevin Monroe**

Yeah, so let's invite people to do something, to take action, right? And when you finish listening to this podcast, what if you pause and you take two minutes and you think of someone on your team or you know whether this is your work team or your home team, your personal team that that's done something that made you smile, done something well, here's the way I usually say it that's made your life better or your day brighter, right? They did something that either brighten your day or lighten your load. Pause now and send them a message whether you send them a Slack message, a text message or WhatsApp message, what if you just pause and take 60, 90 or even up to two minutes, and send that message and go, 'Hey, I was thinking about you, thank you for doing this.' I promise you, there's probably like a 95% chance you're gonna get a very positive response back goes, Wow, thank you. You made my day.



**Gert Mellak**

I did this once sometimes, videos in the park while I'm walking the dog, I might just remember some somebody, record a quick video where I express, express the gratitude, send it over to them. And they definitely it's very much appreciated.

**Kevin Monroe**

It is, it is. And I love what you just said, I do this using LinkedIn. Because you can send an audio message and the audio message has a 62nd limit. So sometimes I'm out on a walk and I go, you know, for the next five minutes, I'm just gonna think of five people and send them a short message. And they always respond. And it's always an uplift to people. So we all have that opportunity. And it's not a super heavy list. Or if you just do one or two messages a day, send these and let people know you, you see them. You value. You appreciate them. You care for them. There will be ripple effects.

**Gert Mellak**

I love it. There's so many, so many fascinating action steps we can take away from here, we're definitely going to summarize them as much as we, as much as we can over Seoleverage dot forward slash podcast. This is episode 122. You're talking to Kevin Monroe getting a lot of interesting advice here. And interesting action steps I want to give you, I'll ask you very briefly, if you could talk about the five day challenge you have on your website I found is really interesting. You didn't get around to do it yet, but I'm going to sign up later today. What is this all about?

**Kevin Monroe**

So, well, a lot of our work is all around hosting events. And two years ago, a friend of mine said, Kevin, you're missing an opportunity. I said what's that? He said if somebody wants to start right now, what can they do? And we ended up creating what we now call it 'The Beginner's Guide to Growing Gratitude'. And it's just a five-day fast start. It walks you through in just a couple of minutes a day, introduces you to the concept of gratitude, introduces a simple framework. The framework we teach it is so stinking simple, pause, notice, express. If you want to grow gratitude. It starts by pausing. And what do you do when you pause, you notice notice whatever. So we walk you through that and kind of introduce that it's a totally free offer five day course. A Beginner's Guide to Growing Gratitude. Well, we'd love to make that as a gift to you. And we'd love to hear what happens to you as you begin your journey. Whether you're beginning your journey for the first time or starting a new journey with gratitude. We'd love to help you guide you to grow gratitude.

**Gert Mellak**

This is amazing if they're going to link to this in the show notes to this beginner's guide. Thank you so much, Kevin for taking the time to talk to us today. Definitely great to go a little bit of a different direction with this podcast. I would love some feedback from our listeners, if this personal development area is something you want to know more about. There are so many interesting people like Kevin with a lot of experience on how to run a better team, how to be a

better leader, how to actually make sure everybody feels appreciated like we learned today. Like I said, Seoleverage.com. Kevin Monroe, thank you so much, Kevin.

**Kevin Monroe**

Thank you What a joy to be your first out of the norm and let's do something different. Let's talk about growing people.

**Gert Mellak**

I love it. Thank you