

ELIMINATE ENTITLEMENT THINKING

By Carol Bergeron

Every day you go to work ready to inspire others and take on the world or at least the competition. Sometimes you encounter situations that have elements of employee entitlement at play. This kind of employee relations issue can consume a lot of management resources thereby reducing time for initiatives to grow your business. Here are some thoughts on the possible triggers of the entitlement mindset and steps to help eliminate it. Couple the ideas with your own tried and true solutions.



- **Triggers of the entitlement mindset**

The employee entitlement mindset can be triggered by things ranging from: strength of a performance based culture, job satisfaction, quality of relationships and the employment experience and reduction in benefits and/or wide disparities in perks afforded to different factions of the workforce.

- **Develop approaches for groups and individuals**

As you formulate an action plan to eliminate entitlement thinking, include approaches that address groups of people like redesigning a reward system for application throughout the organization. Other initiatives will require one-on-one interaction to get at issues like improving the employment experience.

- **Build a performance based culture**

Clarify and communicate goals, targets and metrics of the organization. Link them to written performance goals, targets, and standards for individuals. Monitoring actual outcomes reinforces the importance of results. The goal is to clarify performance expectations and monitor actual results so you and employees recognize success when you see it.

- **Grant rewards based on performance**

Deliberately reward success and do so generously. At the group level design your salary increase, bonus, stock programs to reward top performers. "Across the board" and "merit increases" with little variance between performance levels accomplishes three things. It delights low performers, ticks off top performers and sends a strong message that you are content with mediocre results. Performance based rewards will not be embraced by everyone. So, decide which cadre of employees you want to appeal to most.

Rewards may also take the form of flexibility with work arrangements and time off, etc. When making exceptions, if any, do so based on performance and be consistent. The ironic thing is top performers, characterized by having a strong work ethic, usually ask for fewer exceptions than their lower performing counterparts. When granting an exception, let them know it is because of their past and expected future superior performance and cite examples. When denying an exception, let them know why. These one-on-ones can be turned into powerful, productive feedback forums for stimulating better performance.

- **Conduct the "stay interview"**

I forget who coined the term "stay interview" but it is a very effective technique in getting to the heart of job satisfaction, career development, relationship and work experience enhancers and demotivators from the employee perspective. Most organizations do this at the "exit interview" which leaves little opportunity to change things for any particular individual. Once you engage in this kind of conversation then you and the employee have a better shot at jointly making improvements.

- **Reality of skyrocketing costs**

Changes to benefits and/or increased cost sharing with employees are commonplace and often cited as triggers to the entitlement mindset. In my experience the best approach to tackle this type of issue is twofold: address the rationale behind the decision through education and then acknowledge the impact on personal lives. Be candid about the challenge and your organization's finite resources, what options were considered

and share data and trends indicating your company is not alone. Then relate it back to tough choices we all make in our personal lives. For instance, how many of us raised the deductible on the house or auto insurance policy due to skyrocketing premiums? Persistent discontent by a few may be indicative of something else gone awry so go back to the “stay interview” to identify and address individual concerns and move on.

- **Disparities in Perks**

Employees sometimes form perceptions on the perks or special treatment afforded to particular groups of employees. Their perceptions are their reality. The classic example is the sales person who never works a full day on-site – and gets paid for it, gets to travel to exotic destinations, lodges in top notch hotels and drives fancy rental cars – and gets paid for it, wins company paid trips just for doing his/her job - and gets paid for it. First understand the perceptions and how they were formulated. Help educate folks on the whys. You need not get agreement on the disparities, just understanding. Keep an open ear for the “real issues” and address those.

Triggers of the entitlement mindset can get complex due to many variables at both individual and group levels. Getting to the real issues is sometimes like peeling away the layers of an onion. Take a step back to assess if your systems and practices are working to encourage or discourage entitlement issues. Discover potential triggers through one-on-one conversations where you can address the rationale and personal concerns. Then take appropriate action to eliminate and sustain a culture free of entitlement and full of responsibility, reward and understanding.

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