



## **Dealing with Entitlement**

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Many managers I have the opportunity to coach say things like, “People are no longer motivated the way they used to be. When I was young I never showed a sense of entitlement when I went to work. I was always grateful just to have a job.” In my experience these managers have bad memories. I believe that people are basically good and want to contribute. If they are exhibiting too much entitlement, perhaps it’s time for the leader to take a look in the mirror. Dealing with this problem takes guts, but that’s what leaders do.

### **Sort ‘em out**

Here’s a typical conversation with one of my coaching clients who are dealing with entitlement issues in their employees. When asked how many of their employees had problematic attitudes, they usually respond, “All of them” But upon further inquiry it becomes apparent that there is a small nucleus of employees who care deeply about the welfare of the company and showed their commitment with hard work. I then ask the manager, “When was the last time you told those hard working employees how much you appreciated their efforts?” “Not in a long time”, often comes the reply.

Next I ask my client if they think any of their employees who they wish they had not hired. Once again there is usually a small number who are real “bad apples” and should have been released long ago. Further questioning usually reveals that employees are never formally reviewed so it is possible that the “problem employees have no idea that they are seen as having entitlement issues or are aware of what they need to do to improve. Some leaders are also afraid to fire people because they don’t want to be “the bad guy”. In my experience, if you are never the bad guy your business will end up running you, not the other way around.

### **Motivate the good ones**

The first homework assignment I usually give my client is to start validating the efforts of their best employees. Next, I ask my client to get his employees together in small groups and ask for feedback about how he could be a better boss. This humility usually generates a number of good ideas and does a lot to erase the sense of entitlement in many employees. They feel valued so they start to contribute at a higher level.

### **Hold ‘em accountable**

Although the preceding steps usually improve morale somewhat it is necessary to challenge the entitlement behaviors if we are to finish the job of creating an empowered work force. To accomplish this my client and I work together to write job descriptions for each position within the company and begin to implement a formal review process. In each review, the employee receives a rating, which is then tied to their pay scale and their bonus. Additionally, any employees that were given substandard ratings are given six months to improve. Most do, but some may need to be terminated.

Also each employee receives a set of objectives for the next review period. In this manner, each employee knows what is expected of them if they want to improve their rating, and thus their pay.

## **Results**

Here are some typical results of implementing the changes described above:

- Employee morale improves
- Turnover decreases
- Fewer employees call in sick
- Productivity increases
- Revenues and profits increase accordingly

So, if you are feeling frustrated with a sense of entitlement in your employees, I urge you to look at yourself for the solution. People are pretty much the same everywhere. As I said earlier, I believe that most of them wish to contribute. Sometimes they just require the correct environment to live up to their potential. Creating that environment is your responsibility as a leader.