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EMPOWERMENT VS. ENTITLEMENT, Part III

Entitlement in larger organizations.

As a company grows, the employees needed to continue that growth change. No longer can the company rely on workers who are only interested in a paycheck. Needed now are those who are interested in succeeding in their job and advancing their career.

But the perils of perpetuating a culture of entitlement don't disappear as the competency of the employees increases. In fact, the stakes only get higher as an entitled employee's activities can have an even greater impact on the company.

When our business experiences aggressive growth, it's common to let slip some of the management disciplines that led to that growth. One of those disciplines frequently seen is holding people accountable. Unfortunately, this lack of accountability can unintentionally create a culture of entitlement with some of our workers and discontent with others. It doesn't take long for this to spiral into us feeling held hostage by the discontented workers, which results in us giving into demands that aren't driven by performance but by what others in the organization "have" or are perceived to have.

It's not uncommon for business owners to try to justify the entitled culture they've created with comments like, "We really care about our people" or "We treat our people like family." While these sentiments are noble, they do nothing to change the entitlement culture and, in some ways, may even perpetuate it. Allowing entitled behavior to continue usually has an echoing effect throughout an organization as it is seen and resented by more people.

The complexities of entitlements increase considerably when they include family members who are involved in the company, as we now have the additional layer of emotions and years of history that accompany those relationships.

If we're serious about shifting our company's culture from one of entitlement to one of empowerment, we must realize that the transition will not be quick or painless. Unwinding deeply entrenched entitlements is difficult to do and usually results in entitled workers feeling singled out or punished while the owner wonders if it's worth the effort.

Let me assure you that it is worth the effort. In fact, failing to shift from a culture of entitlement to one of empowerment will have devastating effects on the continued growth of the business and, ultimately, on its overall long-term existence.

For empowerment to take place, individuals need to feel the desire to learn and be challenged, have a sense of autonomy, and a strong need toward job accomplishment. None of these factors are present when a powerful sense of entitlement resides within the company. The desire to perform at a higher level simply does not exist, no matter how much money you pay or benefits you attempt to provide.

Keep in mind that empowerment builds on the element of autonomy and this is where most owners struggle. Permitting employees to have input into how they carry out their duties while also giving them the authority to do so tends to be frightening to the most enlightened leader. Rest assured that we are not suggesting you give away the "keys to the store" but to be a wise giver of autonomy based on ability and accountability.

C.