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EMPOWERMENT VS. ENTITLEMENT, Part II

Entitlement in new or smaller businesses.

When businesses are new or smaller in size it's common for their cultures to revolve around obedience rather than empowerment. After all, many founders started their company because they were driven to control things, including their own destiny and the people around them. I believe this is one of the reasons small businesses are so often populated with family members or with people we know. As a result, there's usually not a lot of empowerment taking place.

Instead, in an effort to control things or to attract and hang onto employees, we sometimes go in the other direction and unintentionally create a culture of entitlement.

Fearing we won't be able to attract and keep qualified workers, owners occasionally go overboard with compensation by offering wages that the company can't afford to support. We paint ourselves into a corner that almost always results in an emotional conversation that often doesn't end well.

But compensation is only one form of entitlement. It continues with the perception of favoritism toward some people, even if *we* don't think we're playing favorites. We might allow certain employees to play by different rules when it comes to showing up for work or for meetings on time, completing paperwork, or the personal use of company vehicles, equipment, and other assets.

Entitlements are a subtle form of an entrepreneurial behavior we refer to as Heroic Managing. We use entitlements in an attempt to control people's behavior and the trajectory of our company instead of using sound management or empowerment to accomplish the same. This is no surprise since many novice business owners haven't yet developed the skills to properly manage people.

Unfortunately, the outcomes of an entitled culture when a company is small are always the same: frustration and complaining on our part, lower productivity because the entitled worker isn't interested in the company's performance (only their own needs), and perhaps, worst of all, there's little to sell when the owner decides it's time to cash out.

As we search for the root causes of an entitlement culture in our company, we should start by looking at the role our own entitled behaviors might be playing in fostering it—even when we aren't aware we're behaving as entitled.

How often do we exhibit behaviors similar to the ones we complain about in our entitled employees? A lack of respect for being punctual or honoring our appointments, failing to complete paperwork or reports, or a general insensitivity to the needs or feelings of others. Trying to justify these behaviors by anointing them "executive privilege" or saying we're just too busy doesn't wash. Our people follow our example before they listen to our words.

The first step to growing beyond a controlling or entitled culture is to step out of our own way. We need to end our desire to control everything, grow beyond the need to be the smartest one in the room, and understand that it's only through our own growth that the rest of our organization will follow.

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