

# **Beware the Deception of “Entitlement”!**

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Which is more characteristic of your underlying presumptions about your work and about your relationships with colleagues and family--“gratitude” or “entitlement”? Before you answer, please know that my only purpose in today’s article is to raise your awareness regarding this question.

“Entitlement” is a legal term meaning a right granted by law or contract. Its common usage, however, refers to government programs that address an inequality regarding access to some perceived basic human right. The term is often controversial, depending on how you view the inequality and whether and how you believe action should be taken to resolve it. Another common usage of “entitled” is in a self-serving reference to anything “I feel I deserve!”

In the past couple of months, I’ve become more sensitive to my personal assumptions of “gratitude” and “entitlement.” Had you asked me the opening question three months ago, I would have thought briefly, then in all seriousness answered that “gratitude” was far more characteristic of my perspective. I’ve been surprised by my insights these past two months as I’ve caught myself thinking, “Hey, that’s not right!”.

I invite you to open yourself to the same degree of reflection. I maintain that the question is hard to answer honestly, especially at first. Assumptions lie beneath the surface of your daily thoughts and actions, invisible to your conscious awareness. Yet those assumptions influence all that you say and do.

You may be desensitized to your feelings of entitlement because the concept of “deserving” is so much a part of our culture (which is very self-serving). Here are some examples:

- United States citizens presume entitlement to protection under the Constitution and its Bill of Rights.
- Entitlement is in many advertisements. For example, McDonald’s says, “You deserve a break today!”
- Entitlement is in birthday cards: “You’re unique! Give yourself the special recognition you deserve!”
- During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees felt (and people driven by a “works” mentality today feel) entitled to the favor of God in return for having labored diligently to abide by God’s law.
- “What’s in it for me?” is a common question in the mind of someone who feels entitled to a reward.
- “That’s not fair!” is usually uttered by someone who feels entitled to treatment identical to (or better than) someone else.

You may know a leader who presumes entitlement from many years of diligent effort, perseverance, and loyalty. Some leaders feel they deserve the power and prestige they’ve achieved, along with future promotions, pay raises, respect, and the everlasting commitment of those under their direction.

CAUTION: The feeling of entitlement can be thrust upon you. If you are in a leadership position, those under your authority may treat you with entitlement because of your role. Consider this insight from Marshall Goldsmith’s book *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*: “Meetings begin when you say they begin. They take place where you want them to take place. They end when you say they are over.” Special treatment like this can become for a leader a “comfortable cocoon of all-powerfulness.”

As you become sensitive to your underlying presumptions of entitlement, consider replacing them with conscious gratitude. For example, you had no control over where you were born, what basic talents you have, or how you were raised. Perhaps you made good choices about how to refine your gifts, but the schools you attended and the earliest jobs you held were made available to you by someone else.

Unless you are quite unusual, the car you drive, the food you eat, the laws that protect you, and nature’s principles (like gravity) were not generated by you. You may have hired all the people on your team, but you are not responsible for their commitment or daily decisions. Instead, you are their beneficiary.

By raising your awareness, my hope is that you embrace a series of small paradigm shifts in which you recognize underlying presumptions of entitlement. Perhaps you will resolve to overtly exchange them for willful expressions of gratitude for the people and circumstances that surround you.

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