

“I Don’t Deserve This!”

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“It’s just not fair! Why is this happening to me? I don’t deserve this!”

As a leader in your organization, how often have you heard that complaint? (Maybe you’ve had similar thoughts!)

The exclamation is a common lament from folks who feel they’re being inappropriately treated.

We all seem to have an inner sense of what’s fair and what’s not. Our sensibilities are set on edge when we find ourselves on the exasperating side of some situation.

However, who among us complains, “That’s not fair!” when we are on the unexpectedly favorable side of receiving benefits we don’t deserve? And, let’s face it, surprisingly good things happen a lot.

A word not commonly used in our society describes receiving benefits we don’t deserve. We don’t use this word in our culture much because it is associated with religion, linked with days past when the church was a more significant centerpiece of our communities. “Grace” is the word that describes undeserved favor.

Yet there is much in life that we enjoy that we did not earn. Let’s start with life itself. You did nothing to deserve being born. You were not involved in the activity leading up to the release of millions of sperm cells, each aggressively seeking your mother’s egg cell of the month. Had “your” sperm cell not been the victor, your mother would have birthed your brother or your sister!

You had nothing to do with the development of the complex systems in your body-- nerves, liver, heart, brain, digestive system, endocrine glands, etc. And so much of your success today is a function of the freely given influence of your parents, grandparents, and teachers.

You have been on this earth for X number of years, breathing air you didn’t create, being held down by gravity you didn’t invent and don’t control, and consuming energy delivered by a star you didn’t place in the sky and you don’t refuel. For many years, you’ve essentially taken for granted that which you enjoy and use every day, treasures given to you that you didn’t earn.

“Entitlement” is a word you’ve likely encountered. It’s not exactly the opposite of grace, but it often goes along with the allegation of “That’s not fair!” The person saying those words deeply believes he or she deserves some privilege. The right of entitlement is presumed by many people in our society.

Since my articles emphasize leadership, let’s focus for a moment on the responsibility you now fill in your organization. Were you entitled to this role, or did you have to earn it? You likely executed responsible choices and successfully handled difficult interactions before your promotion.

Let’s now go back a few years--to when you accepted employment with your organization. Were you responsible for establishing the vacancy that you filled? Wasn’t the position somehow made known to you by an outside source? Was there no one else in the world more qualified to fill the role than you? Wasn’t it simply a matter of convenience that there was no one else immediately available?

Were you not the beneficiary of being in the right place at the right time? Oh, you may argue that you worked hard for the experience you gained prior to assuming your current role. Were you the one who invented the language which was used to educate you? Did you prepare those professors who passed along their wisdom to you? Did you orchestrate all the trial-and-error learning you obtained from the many undiscovered and forgiven mistakes you made along the way?

In your current role, don't you have some very capable individuals serving under your authority? It's unlikely that you recruited and trained each of them. And aren't you appreciative that, through their initiative and persistence, they often make you look impressive to your superiors?

Please forgive me. I don't want to take from you the education and hard work that have contributed to your current responsibilities. I do, however, want you to take a fresh look at how much you--along with the rest of the human race--take for granted. We have all been blessed with gifts which we did not earn and do not deserve. We have, however, accepted them and called them our own.

Further, I am suggesting that you pause, reflect, and feel a bit of gratitude for all that has been and continues to be given to you. And what do I suggest you do with that thankfulness?

Serve. Listen. Be generous. Be kind. Care. Give opportunity to others. Be humble. Be patient. Build the skills of those under your authority. Forgive. Observe. Offer compassion. Encourage. Reflect. Apologize. Compliment. Mentor. Appreciate. Seek feedback. Become a more effective leader!

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