**The E word. Entitlement.**

Wait…don’t tune out when you read that word. I admit, it has been overused, but bear with me for a moment.

Instead of seeing entitlement as a negative, I invite you to focus on how the exploration of entitlement can help you grow your business. The conversation around employees going back to the office is happening across public and private sectors. Leaders are hearing employee requests of what they want and need to make them feel productive, safe, and profitable. Finding talent is a pervasive issue facing businesses right now. The problem is many leaders are not prepared with the right mindset to accommodate those requests, because they have been navigating situations beyond their control for the past year.

**Let's face it, we are tired.**

Now, with the return to the office, it may seem employees are asking for special accommodations because they feel entitled. After all, they stayed with you through difficult times. Prior to the pandemic, you asked for their input on ways to make the work culture better. Did you encourage them to ask for what they wanted or needed?

You may have inadvertently created a culture of entitlement that your team members are taking you up on. Pre-pandemic, innocent company perks like in office coffee bars, quiet or resting space, open offices and more were commonplace and signaled that you wanted your team to feel valued at work. Whitney Johnson, author of the HBR article: Entitlement as an Innovation Killer outlines the pitfalls to the entitlement mentality saying:

“Here’s how I see entitlement playing out for me as an individual: it enters the picture when I think I have the right to something, like a promotion, just because I showed up. Or I expect someone to do me a favor, without any reciprocity, just because I need it.”

**Intentional Entitlement**

However, now your people are coming back with real-life desires. Presently, the coffee bar is not as important as flexible work hours or a mid-day break to check in with family. The post Covid entitlement position is different from the pre Covid position. They are asking that employers be intentional in considering their work life balance needs that were fulfilled in new ways during the pandemic.

In fact, Kate Lister of Global Workplace Analytics discovered that 80% of the workforce wanted to work from home at least part of the time, pre pandemic! She writes:

The genie is out of the bottle and it's not likely going back in.

The solution might very well become proactive and intentional in designing a new solution for our employees. Whether we think they are entitled to hybrid work models puts us behind in hiring and retention at this point. While not a threat, yet, my opinion on this is strong: be intentional or risk losing your people.

Why? Before the pandemic, there was an expectation that people check their personal lives at the door, keeping a nice separation between personal and professional lives. Post pandemic, employees are coming back with their personal and professional lives and concerns intertwined. They have had meetings with dogs barking in the back ground, grocery deliveries happening and a quick wipe of runny noses while attending meetings. Their 15 step commute to their kitchen desk has replaced typically 1-2 hours of commuting a day. A new reality has set in. And, they like it!

Almost every client I work with said that one of the benefits of the pandemic was reconnecting with their spouse. If it's benefitting you as a CEO, can you imagine the benefits to those who work deeper into your organization?

It's a powerful shift happening. Your people are not only thinking about how to be successful at work, but they are also thinking of what a successful family looks like, how to care for aging parents and what does it take to keep everyone anchored in a wellness mindset. They are wondering how to contribute in a way that makes the whole professional and personal grow and advance.

While team members have been working from home, they have had intimate and connected conversations with their peers and leaders. They may be feeling entitled to continue these connections. This is a mindset of entitlement that you can build on and even turning what could be a negative into a positive.

**What’s the Key to Entitlement that Works for All?**

They key is to reflect on what matters most to your workforce and how you might support meaningful entitlement in your culture? You can move away from trendy perks like the ping pong table or the coffee bar and lean into meaningful caring measures that speak to the cares and concerns of your team. The pandemic brought us back to square one in some instances. This offers a new opportunity for you to express intentional entitlement as a building position instead of a resistant position.

I recently heard an executive talk about the new perks they are putting in place with their teams. Things like planned walking breaks, where everyone in the company schedules time to go out and walk or go to the park. This practice was not reserved for employees or team members, but everyone from front line to the CEO participated. They also started an international kids hour so that their children could get on a Zoom call and meet other children from around the world.

One company revamped their employee benefit package to include mental wellness support and planned compensation growth meetings.

This is intentional entitlement.

What do you want your team members to expect from you in this new work paradigm? How will getting out in front of the expectations with positive “people honoring practices” help protect you from those seeking entitlement as a demand? Or, prevent those who might want to make you obligated to “give in” when you know it’s not the right way to go?

Instead of getting perturbed at what you might define as entitlement, use this opportunity to create a new pathway forward. Communicate this new plan so every person in your organization knows where you stand and how you want to support them going forward.

**Solve the Right Problem**

When it comes to your team, solving the right problem is vital. Behind the demands for what just feels like "more" to you, may be a signal they want to be part of something bigger and better than they had before. They are with you for your success and their success. Build on this and use it to the advantage of the company…the whole company.

We are coming out of a season of great turmoil. People have had their hopes, dreams and values challenged. Glean the most promising and positive input so that you can go forward with your new model of connected and intentional entitlement.

Prioritize your Intentional Entitlement Position and turn it into a new offering for your team. This strategy will pay dividends now and well into the future.

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**About Cheryl Scanlan**

Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent and executable strategy.

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