Feeling entitled leads to more creativity, study shows

November 14 2014, by Stephen D'angelo

New research has discovered a highly sought-after byproduct of entitlement – creativity. The finding is outlined in the paper "Deserve and Diverge: Feeling Entitled Makes People More Creative,"by Emily Zitek of the ILR School and Vanderbilt University research scholar Lynne Vincent, Ph.D. '13.

"In this research, we discovered that increased creativity is one positive consequence of increased state [of] entitlement," Zitek said. "In general, entitlement is viewed as a bad thing that should be eliminated, but this research shows that there could actually be an advantage to boosting the entitlement of individuals."

The study was published online Oct. 31 by the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Through four studies, Zitek, assistant professor in ILR's Department of Organizational Behavior, concluded that making test subjects feel more entitled had a positive effect on creativity. Each study was designed to examine the creative performances of participants who were, or were not, temporarily coaxed into an entitled mindset.

For example, in one study, participants were given five minutes to write about why they should or should not feel more entitled than others. Afterward, they were asked to complete two tasks measuring creativity, including listing different ways to use a paperclip and drawing an alien creature from another planet. Participants who were manipulated into

feeling more entitled were more creative during the exercises.

The study acknowledges that its findings can be helpful for managers dealing with entitled employees. Zitek writes that she and Vincent learned entitled individuals see themselves as different from others, and this need to feel unique could be helpful or harmful when performing creative tasks where differing from others is important to success.

"On one hand, trying to make employees feel similar to others can reduce entitlement, but it might also reduce creativity," Zitek says. "On the other hand, boosting entitlement to encourage temporary creativity might turn them into a nuisance, but the manager might accept that if creativity is the main goal."

For the workplace, this creates the potential for sensitivities in team dynamics. However, the study argues that carefully managed temporary entitlement could help drive success.

"Perhaps some of the negative consequences of entitlement are due to entitled individuals' desire to be different and could be eliminated by allowing them to express their differences in a more productive way," Zitek wrote. "For example, due to the heightened need for uniqueness associated with entitlement, entitled individuals might be more willing and able to engage in other tasks that require them to stand out, such as public speaking, pitching an idea and whistleblowing."

For workplace culture, it is a delicate tightrope to walk.

More information: Emily M. Zitek, Lynne C. Vincent, "Deserve and Diverge: Feeling Entitled Makes People More Creative," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Available online 31 October 2014, ISSN 0022-1031, dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.10.006.

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