

The Inequity Of Equality

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We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; - Thomas Jefferson – The Declaration of Independence – July 1776

When Thomas Jefferson wrote these words back in 1776, he created a vision of equality among men that we still aspire to today. We aspire to equality among men because we understand that all men (and women) bring value to every aspect of life. And while we aspire to equality, we understand that each individual brings their own special gifts and talents to the party. It's those special gifts and talents that make each of us unique in our own way.

There is no question that equality is the backbone of democracy and that without equality our society would be vastly different than it is today. But the question of equality, as defined by Thomas Jefferson and the framers of the Constitution is sometimes confused with the need to treat everyone equally or identically.

This topic becomes more and more important as more and more people are bending over backwards in an attempt to be fair in the workplace.

Now, don't get us wrong. We're all in favor of treating your employees, customers, and even your bosses fairly. But someplace along the line we seem to have confused equal opportunity with equal outcome, and we have championed this concept under the guise of "being fair."

We pay people who do similar jobs with remarkably different outcomes the same, and call it "being fair."

We fail to offer advanced training to our top techs because we can't afford to send ALL of the techs. So we eliminate their training under the guise of "being fair."

We give all our people the same 4% raise and call it fair, even though certain employees have made significant contributions to the organization and others have merely shown up. Because sharing the money equally is "fair."

We don't identify and groom our best employees for the future because singling them out for praise, training, or additional responsibilities would not be "fair" to those who were not chosen.

We treat all of our employees exactly the same, regardless of their value to the team, the customer, and the company, and we call it “fair.”

When stories like this arise, we tend to write them off as being isolated incidents, limited in scope to a few untrained managers who do not understand that an equal opportunity to succeed should never be confused with an equal expectation of outcome. However, as the chorus grows louder, we hear more and more horror stories of how people attempt to identify, develop, and reward their best and brightest, only to be chastised for not treating all employees exactly the same. They’ve been vilified for failure to provide not only equal opportunity to all employees, but also equal outcomes, regardless of the employees’ performance.

Being fair, and giving your employees an equal opportunity for success, is absolutely the right thing to do. But never confuse equal opportunity with equal outcomes. Trying to create an environment where everyone is treated the same, under the guise of fairness, will, in reality, create an environment of mediocrity. When people who work hard and have demonstrated success are not rewarded for their actions because it’s not “fair,” you have essentially told them that they are not valued. And when you don’t value your best employees you can bet that they will find someone else who will.

An engaged and energized workforce leads to higher productivity, reduced costs, improved customer service, and increased profitability. Employee engagement happens when your Corporate Culture, Leadership Style, and Employee Expectations are in synch.

The Fusion Program from ECI Learning Systems is designed to align these 3 concepts in your organization – engaging your employees and creating positive energy that will propel your company to new heights.

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