

Hungry workers feel more entitled, research suggests

August 20 2014, by Mary Catt

Bosses, do yourselves a favor. Spring for lunch at those late morning meetings with workers.

Chances are, they'll think more like team players when they're not hungry as you power through the agenda, according to research presented by Emily Zitek, ILR School assistant professor, at the Academy of Management annual meeting in Montreal Aug. 6.

"Hungry people think about themselves instead of others and focus on their own needs, which leads them to feel and act entitled," according to the study Zitek conducted with Dartmouth College colleague Alex Jordan.

Entitlement often has social or psychological roots, but can also be driven "by amplified levels of a basic physiological drive – hunger – which may cause people to turn their focus inward and place their needs above those of others," the researchers say.

Understanding the relationship between hunger and entitlement can provide an easy way to potentially modify a person's sense of entitlement, which could have positive consequences in the workplace, school or home.

Also, compared with other sources of increased entitlement, such as unfair treatment, "entitlement brought on by hunger should be much more modifiable," Zitek and Jordan said in their presentation, "I Need

Food and I Deserve a Raise: People Feel More Entitled When Hungry."

Two experiments yielded the hunger-entitlement link.

In one, 103 undergraduates were surveyed as they entered or exited a dining hall at lunchtime. The self-reported entitlement of participants who had not eaten lunch was significantly higher compared with that of those who had already dined.

Participants indicated whether they had eaten lunch or not and how hungry they were. Also, through the Psychological Entitlement Scale, they were asked how much they agreed with such statements as "Great things should come to me," "If I were on the Titanic, I would deserve to be on the first lifeboat" and "I demand the best because I'm worth it."

Hungrier participants scored higher on the entitlement scale.

In addition, since entitled individuals are less likely to help others, subjects were asked if they would help the researchers by filling out an additional survey; 78 percent of those who had eaten lunch agreed compared with 60 percent who had not eaten.

In a second experiment with 166 students, some participants sat in a room where they could smell frozen pizza being cooked and then picked up by an individual who entered the room, said she was getting her lunch, removed the pizza from the toaster oven and left the room. The other participants sat in a room where no pizza was cooking.

Consistent with the authors' hypothesis, those who were made to feel hungry by the smell of pizza had a stronger sense of entitlement, as measured by the scale, compared with the control group.

"Hunger levels fluctuate through the day, and people's sense of

entitlement seems to fluctuate with them," Zitek and Jordan said in their study.

"Entitlement can cause big problems in the workplace, so managers might want to provide food to employees or wait to schedule potentially contentious meetings until after lunch."

More information: Zitek, E. M., & Jordan, A. H. (2014, August). "I need food and I deserve a raise: People feel more entitled when hungry" [Electronic version]. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from Cornell University, ILR School site:

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