

Incentive vs. Entitlement: A sense of entitlement has crept into our daily lives today. Not just young people, but almost all of us. We feel we have a right to perks that would have been luxuries a hundred years ago—things like air conditioning, indoor toilets, carpeted homes, automobiles, phones, televisions and entertainment. We expect these realities and complain when we don't get them promptly. We feel they are a right. Whenever we assume something is a right—we tend to lose incentive to earn it.

It's the difference between rights and responsibilities. When we think we are entitled to something, we assume someone will act on our behalf. When we think we are responsible for something, we assume we must act. Often times, the privilege is perceived as a right. People start feeling entitled.

Too often, we've cultivated a sense of entitlement in our young people. They have grown up under our leadership and we fostered it in them. We felt it was our job to give them perks that years ago were items kids worked for. Over time, we stole their incentive. When adult leaders rush to give privileges to our young, we treat those privileges as a right they possess. Thus, they lose incentive to work for it.

When our youth begin to demand, assume or desire something, we must do a motive check on the situation: who has the greater incentive for benefit - them or you? If it's them, you will diminish their sense of entitlement by leveraging their incentive to get it. If they stand to gain, make that clear.

In a case study with a new experiment at a high school in New Haven, CT, the year ended with "shocking" results: not a single one of the 44 first-time freshmen earned enough credits to move up to sophomore year. The teachers, newly empowered to break from traditional practices, have begun to reinvent the high school experience by switching freshmen to a self-paced system where kids move up only when they've "mastered" specific skills. The goal is to make sure kids learn something instead of breezing through school with D's. Unlike students at other schools, these 44 kids won't have to repeat their freshman year. They'll get an opportunity to finish their work over a new, four-week summer school. Then, if they need more time, they can start off the year right where they left off, instead of repeating entire classes. The key is they have to earn their progress. The incentive is all theirs.

As we are getting ready to embark on our county fair season in western Kansas, we are reminded that the 4-H youth development program does not focus on the competition element of the county fairs, but the educational aspect that comes from participating in contests and competitions. We all thrive on the rush of a competition and who is crowned the champion. When looking at the path it took to get to the competition, it is the ups and downs, the educational learning opportunities and day to day challenges that ultimately create champions in every participant.

Judging involves opinions. When you exhibit at a fair, you are asking for a second opinion. You have already formed your evaluation or viewpoint about your project work. The judge doesn't always know the problems you had or why you chose to do what you did. Your answers to questions help a judge to better know about your work. You chose to have them evaluate your exhibit when you entered it at the fair. You might not agree and that's OK, but you are not 'entitled' to that purple or blue ribbon. Incentive to do well has earned whatever ribbon color the judge feels is deserved. Remember to be gracious and respect the judge's opinion.

At this point, let's make sure that we are giving our youth incentives to complete their own work. As parents, we many times want our youth to be at the top, but we must remember to step back and make sure that our "assistance" in completing projects doesn't become solely the "work" of the parent. Working together on projects creates a bond between a parent and a child, but for example, maybe the parent could work on their own craft project or foods exhibit to enter in Open Class.

Youth development goals for the Kansas 4-H program are often referred to as Life Skills. Those Life Skills include: Building a Positive Self-Concept, Developing an Inquiring Mind, Relating to Others, Developing Concern for the Community and Learning to Make Decisions.

4-H is not about awards, projects, competitions or money -- 4-H is about helping youth grow and develop as young adults. In our opinion, everyone is a "Winner" -- regardless of the ribbon color. Our goal is to have "Purple Ribbon 4-Hers", not just purple ribbon animals, cakes and dresses. Enjoy the fair season in western Kansas!

This article was adapted from Tim Elmore's "Growing Leaders" Weekly Digest.

Please contact Patsy Maddy at your local Extension office to find out more about "Inspiring Kids To Do" through our 4-H program, the nation's largest youth organization. General information can also be found on our website at www.twincreeks.ksu.edu and 'Like' our Facebook page at K-State Research and Extension Twin Creeks District.

Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, contact Twin Creeks Extension District at Norton (785-877-5755), Decatur (785-475-8121), Sheridan (785-675-3268) or Graham (785-421-3411). Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.