

CLUES TO CRITICAL THINKING

"A Manifesto for the Entitled"

By Steven Pearlstein, *Washington Post*, September 29, 2012

This column appeared in the Washington Post five weeks before the 2012 election pitting President Barack Obama against businessman and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and shortly after a video recording revealed Romney saying that 47 percent of the American population paid no tax, considered themselves entitled to food, shelter, and health care, and would never vote for him.

I am a corporate chief executive.

I am a business owner.

I am a private-equity fund manager.

I am the misunderstood superhero of American capitalism, single-handedly creating wealth and prosperity despite all the obstacles put in my way by employees, government and the media.

I am a job creator and I am entitled.

I am entitled to complain about the economy even when my stock price, my portfolio and my profits are at record levels.

I am entitled to a healthy and well-educated workforce, a modern and efficient transportation system and protection for my person and property, just as I am entitled to demonize the government workers who provide them.

I am entitled to complain bitterly about taxes that are always too high, even when they are at record lows.

I am entitled to a judicial system that efficiently enforces contracts and legal obligations on customers, suppliers and employees but does not afford them the same right in return.

I am entitled to complain about the poor quality of service provided by government agencies even as I leave my own customers on hold for 35 minutes while repeatedly telling them how important their call is.

I am entitled to a compensation package that is above average for my company's size and industry, reflecting the company's aspirations if not its performance.

I am entitled to have the company pay for breakfasts and lunches, a luxury car and private jet travel, my country club dues and home security systems, box seats to all major sporting events, a pension equal to my current salary and a full package of insurance—life, health, dental, disability and long-term care—through retirement.

I am entitled to have my earned income taxed as capital gains and my investment income taxed at the lowest rate anywhere in the world—or not at all.

I am entitled to inside information and favorable investment opportunities not available to ordinary investors. I am entitled to brag about my investment returns.

I am entitled to pass on my accumulated wealth tax-free to heirs, who in turn, are entitled to claim that they earned everything they have.

I am entitled to use unlimited amounts of my own or company funds to buy elections without disclosing such expenditures to shareholders or the public.

I am entitled to use company funds to burnish my own charitable reputation.

I am entitled to provide political support to radical, uncompromising politicians and then complain about how dysfunctional Washington has become.

Although I have no clue how government works, I am entitled to be consulted on public policy by politicians and bureaucrats who have no clue about how business works.

I am entitled to publicly criticize the president and members of Congress, who are not entitled to criticize me.

I am entitled to fire any worker who tries to organize a union. I am entitled to break any existing union by moving, or threatening to move, operations to a union-hostile environment.

I am entitled to a duty of care and loyalty from employees and investors who are owed no such duty in return.