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By Donna Zajonc



## Loyal to a Fault?

Recently I have heard several clients say they are unhappy at work and will not consider a change because they want to be loyal to their commitments. What is loyalty? Simply stated, loyalty is a commitment to a person, group or cause. Sounds pretty clear, doesn't it? Balancing our loyalty to everything we value can be challenging in today's pressure-packed world.

"Are you loyal to the idea of being loyal?"

The US Marine Corps loyalty code, "The Love of the Corps at all Costs" is an example of loyalty on the far end of the loyalty continuum. A security threat to our life or safety may require loyalty at all costs. In that context it is understandable that loyalty to the group comes above all else.

At the other end of the loyalty continuum is a person who only values their needs and will exploit the group or situation for personal gain. An

appropriate dose of loyalty lies somewhere in the middle of the loyalty continuum.

Most daily life situations are a complex mix of competing demands. If any one of these demands become out of balance due to our loyalty to one particular person, group or cause, then other areas of our life will surely become imbalanced.

Here are a few examples of what people might say if loyalty is distorted or out of balance in their life:

- The department head feels that speaking up or disagreeing with him or her is being disloyal.
- Staying in a job because you will be disloyal to your word even though you are very unhappy.
- Remaining committed to a project even after new information tells you you're on the wrong track.
- Your boss asks you to lie to protect him or her or to help your department look good.
- You will not "snitch" on your friends out of loyalty to your group.

What does each of these examples have in common? The common trait I see

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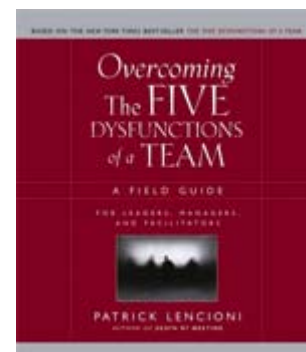
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### Book of the Month

*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

by

Patrick Lencioni



[Buy online at Amazon.com](#)

"Working in Teams doesn't have to be so painful. This book lays out the core issues that each team must do well in order to succeed."

~Donna

is not telling the truth about the situation. In some form or another, honesty will be compromised.

The foundation of balanced loyalty is trust and truthfulness. When you are truthful about the current reality of the situation, it is more likely you will speak and act with honesty and integrity.

**If we are loyal to a person, group or cause in a way that prevents us from seeing the situation as it really is, then we are being loyal to a fault. Blind loyalty can mask the issues that must be addressed.** In the long run, this type of loyalty will work against the very person (that person may be you!), group or cause that we so desperately believe in.

Courageous authenticity is the ability to take tough stands and bring up the risky issues that the group or individuals avoid discussing. Openly dealing with what needs to be said, with compassion and tact, allows you to display your loyalty based upon your commitment to honesty.

Consider these questions:

- Where may your loyalty cause you to be blind to the reality of the situation?
- How might your commitment to loyalty be working against you?
- If you did not have loyalty toward .....(fill in the blank).... what would you be free to say or do?

Loyalty is a positive leadership attribute and essential for success. However, if loyalty becomes an excuse for not telling the truth to yourself or the person or group you believe in, then loyalty can become a weakness. If you are attached to loyalty as a virtue that you must hold on too at all costs, it is likely you are on one end of the loyalty continuum and out of balance.

**Ask yourself if you are being loyal to the idea of being loyal.** If so, you may have a tendency to "spin" the true and not see if for what it is. When this happens, "uncoupling" from binding loyalty may be necessary. Here are a few strategies to help you "uncouple" from loyalty that may be preventing you from seeing current reality:

1. Identify what is most important to you. What are your core values and priorities?
2. Ask friends or work associates not as attached to the organization or cause as you are, for their input. What are they seeing that you don't see?
3. Be sure you are rested and have enough distance from the situation so you can see it again for the very first time.
4. Ask yourself, "If I knew before I made this commitment what I now know, would I commit myself to this....(fill in the blank)....again?"

Your gifts as a leader are most powerful when they match up with the person, organization or cause you believe in. Keeping a sustainable balance on the loyalty continuum will allow you to be courageously authentic with yourself and the cause or organization you hold dear.

## Favorite Video of the Month!

As I approach my 60th birthday next year, the message in this YouTube video is hitting close to home. Watch it just for fun!

[Watch Video](#)

## Favorite Leadership Articles

### [Lencioni on Teamwork](#)

In this short article you will get a full flavor of Patric Lencioni's philosophy of teamwork.

Thanks to Craig Owens, City Manager of Clayton, MO for reminding me of this classic 1999 article on [City Council/Staff Relationships by Nahn Nalbandian](#). Once a mayor and councilman himself, Nalbandian is now Chair of the Department of Public Affairs at the University of Kansas.

[Please share with me your favorite articles or books on leadership.](#)

## Quote of the Month

*"Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing."*

Warren Bennis, Ph.D. from [On Becoming a Leader](#)

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## Testimonials

*"Thanks so much for your help with my development. There is a lot of change underway, but I feel am being proactive on many fronts. I have handled these things much more effectively than I would have 6 months ago."*

Executive VP & Director of  
Medical Research

*"Donna was instrumental in my business success which tripled revenue since its inception. She pushes me to excel where I am strong and helps me avoid pitfalls that have plagued me in the past. I highly recommend her assistance."*

President & CEO

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