

# Why Loyalty Matters

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*The Groundbreaking Approach to  
Rediscovering Happiness, Meaning,  
and Lasting Fulfillment in Your Life and Work*

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Timothy Keiningham and Lerzan Aksoy  
with Luke Williams



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To those who truly believe that we all matter, and who seek to make the world a better place by acting like we do.



*Lack of loyalty is one of the major causes of failure  
in every walk of life.*

—Napoleon Hill (1883–1970), excerpted from  
*Think and Grow Rich* (originally published in 1937—  
arguably the bestselling success book of all time)



Hana Keiningham, Sage Keiningham, Alexander Keiningham, Christopher Keiningham, and Deren Kurtay . . . we do this in the hope that you will grow up in a world surrounded by loving, loyal friends.

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Chapter 3

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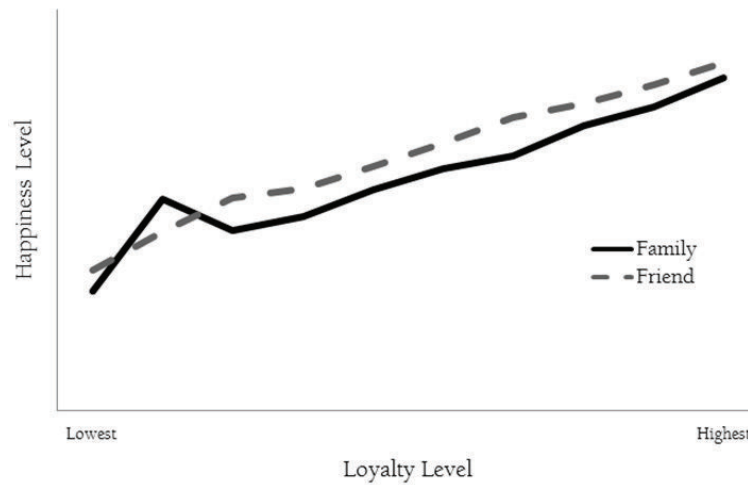
## Building Loyal Relationships

*Nobody would choose to live  
without friends, even if he had all  
other good things.*

—Aristotle

When most of us think of our strongest loyalties, we tend to think of friends, family, spouses, and lovers. In fact, for most of us, these loyalties have the greatest influence on our happiness.

*Happiness Level by Loyalty Level*



Source: Ipsos Loyalty

Sadly, research today indicates that the number and quality of friendships for the average American has been

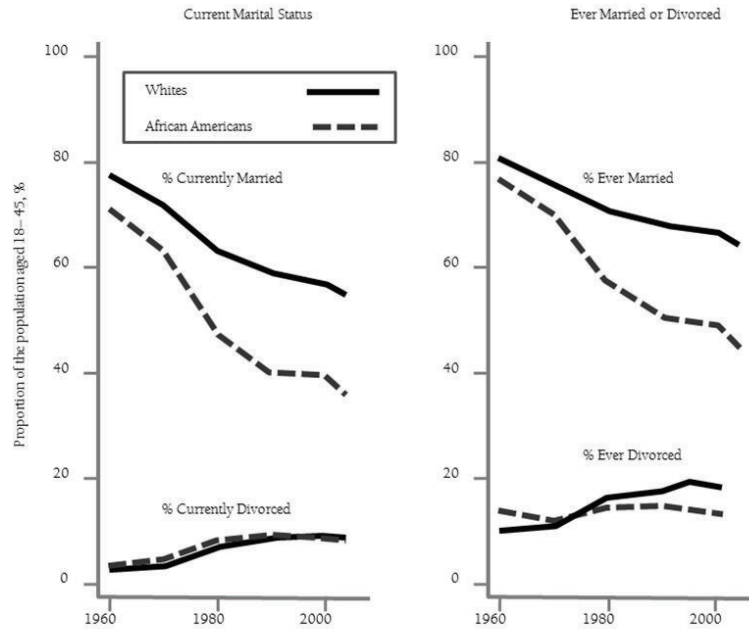
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declining since at least 1985. In fact, 25 percent of Americans report having no close friends in whom they could confide things that were important to them. And the average total number of confidants per person is only two. Just twenty years ago—within our very own lifetimes—the average American had three people with whom he/she could share important issues. The depressing truth is that an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the U.S. population are chronically lonely—this is somewhere between 30 and 45 million people!

And we aren't only watching the number and quality of our friendships decline. Marriages today are far more likely to end in divorce than they were fifty years ago. And at the other extreme, the percentage of individuals who never marry has also risen dramatically—in some countries precipitously. For example, in Japan, the rise in the number of people choosing to forgo marriage has led to a declining birth rate and an aging population that, if left unchecked, will make it impossible to sustain its economy.

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*Marriage and Divorce Statistics for the United States*



Source: Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers (2007), "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and Their Driving Forces," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring), page 36.

Interestingly, it's not that we lack information designed to help us in making our relationships work. In fact, a quick check of Books in Print reveals that this is an extremely important topic to us. Almost fifty thousand books have been written on making friends alone. And many, if not most, of the more than one hundred thousand books on relationships (friendship, marriage, etc.) offer valuable insight.

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So why the disconnect? Why in the age of information are we unable to build relationships that make us happier? Clearly, the time pressures of living in the modern world eat away at our opportunities to connect with one another. But we believe that this is not the root cause of the problem. Rather, it is our unwillingness to see our own role in the general decline of loyalty that is a major cause of relationship disintegration. And this disintegration ultimately leads to our unhappiness.

### **Sticking**

If you ask a four-year-old what a friend is, she is likely to give a response regarding someone who happens to be near her or whose toys she likes. A five- or six-year-old would focus on particular episodes where they interact. At ages seven, eight, and nine, children begin to realize that friendship is personal, and they may like or dislike a person due to some trait.

In later years, however, we begin to realize that human relationships are complex. When adults are asked what friendship means, some of the most frequent words that come forth are *loyalty, honesty, respect, trust, intimacy, help,* and *support*. This is true across cultures.

So why do we build strong relationships with some and not others? Part of the reason is that we naturally gravitate to people like ourselves. We tend to be more comfortable with people who have relationship styles similar to our own. The more alike our interests and attitudes are, the more likely we are to be friends.

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Common interests make us more likeable to each other. And we all like to be liked! Not surprisingly, we tend to like people who like us and dislike people who do not like us.

But our commonalities will only take us so far. Strong relationships (be they friends, family, lovers, etc.) create an implied promise: *I will be there for you!* It is this loyalty that differentiates friend from acquaintance, companion from escort.

Loyalty at its essence is about sticking with one another. It means that we strongly intend to keep the relationship going. It means that we are emotionally attached to one another. And it means that we envision a future together.

The loyal are not simply members of the entourage that inevitably arrives when things are going well. It's easy to get people to come to the party. But when the party's over, who is there to help you clean up? Any fan of American blues music will recall the familiar lament of the famed Lonnie Johnson: "When I had plenty of money, I had friends all over town, but just as soon as I got outdoors, none of my friends could be found." As Oprah Winfrey notes, "Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down."

Loyal companions can rely on one another. This interdependence actually affects our motives, preferences, behaviors, and outcomes. In healthy relationships, it helps us to become better people than we could be alone. But it requires forgoing our immediate self-interest to help a friend in need. In other words, loyalty at times demands sacrifice.

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It is the testing of bonds in difficult times because of loyalty that is the hallmark of strong relationships. Knowing that someone will be there for us when the going gets tough provides us with immense security. And it is virtually impossible to be happy until we feel secure.

### **Forgiveness**

“I’m only human.” We all say it. But we don’t say it to indicate that we are the most advanced life form currently proven to exist in the universe. We say it to indicate that there will be times when we will disappoint others . . . and ourselves.

Nowhere are we more human than in our relationships with others. We are rarely more emotionally vulnerable. And as we envision the future of our closest relationships, we can be certain of one thing—at some point everyone who is close to us will disappoint us so long as we both live long enough. This means that at some point, we too will disappoint those for whom we care most deeply.

These experiences hurt—especially those failures that we believe are particularly disloyal. Even today, it is easy for the authors to remember the hurt felt as a child at having our secrets shared openly with others by friends. And the scars never seem to heal fully when recalling the pain of having let down a friend.

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Yes, this is indeed part of being human. It is so much of who we are that all major religious faiths address the fact that we will at times fall short of our duty of loyalty.

A particularly poignant story in the New Testament tells of Peter, one of the twelve apostles and one of the first disciples of Jesus. Peter is portrayed throughout the New Testament as the most loyal follower of Jesus and his role in the early Christian church is beyond dispute. Many Christian followers believe Peter was the first bishop of Rome and a martyr under Nero, and that he was crucified upside down because he believed himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Despite this ardent faith, however, all the Gospels in the New Testament detail that Jesus foretold to Peter that he would renounce his association with Him three times that very night. Peter protested strongly, vowing, "I will not deny you." But after Jesus was arrested by the Romans, Peter did exactly as Jesus had predicted. At sunrise, Peter, overcome with remorse at his disloyalty, broke down weeping.

Even the most loyal relationships are open and vulnerable to potential betrayal, conflict, and negative outcomes. This can easily lead us to become jaded about relationships and approach new experiences with our guard up. While this makes perfect sense from a survival instinct perspective, it causes us to miss out on rewarding experiences we could have had with others.

Although a certain degree of caution is critical to emotional survival, being overly cautious is extremely

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detrimental. It leads us to form prejudices against potential new relationships even when it is not warranted. While there may be some truth to the saying “good fences make good neighbors,” a wall with no gates in it is a prison. As poet Robert Frost writes in the poem “Mending Wall”:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know,  
What I was walling in or walling out.

Frost beautifully captures the paradox in human nature. We want a wall to protect ourselves from being hurt by others, but walls also keep friends out.

The story of Peter serves to remind us that all of us are indeed human. In the end, our ability to hold onto our relationships lies in our power to forgive—to forgo a desire for retribution and a demand for atonement.

As British poet Alexander Pope observed, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” The truth is that we all fail. Promises sometimes get broken. But loyalty to our relationships requires that we make the best effort to understand the conflict and deal with it in the best possible way. And when we fail, we must make every effort to restore what we have damaged.

### **Perception Is Reality**

For those of us who took advantage of the opportunity in LoyaltyAdvisor to have friends and family members assess

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our loyalty, the results consistently point to areas where we can do a better job of expressing our loyalty to them. Often, the results reveal a great divide between how we view our loyalty and how our friends and family view it.

Do our friends believe without a doubt that we convincingly demonstrate our loyalty to them? Are they certain that we have and will continue to . . .

- Devote enough time to our relationships with them?
- Stand up for them when it is uncomfortable, even risky, to do so?
- Celebrate their successes without envy?
- Support them during difficult times?
- Hold fast to information provided in confidence?
- Make every effort to carry our commitments to them even when it requires considerable self-sacrifice?

This isn't easy to do. In some aspect of our relationships, virtually all of us disappoint in conveying our loyalty to friends and family. We all know this. Yet somehow knowing this intellectually doesn't make it less uncomfortable to have it confirmed.

So instead of really listening for constructive feedback to guide us in improving our relationships with those who mean the most to our happiness, we typically seek confirmation that everything is okay. But improvement never comes with being satisfied with where you are.

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Developing loyal lifelong relationships requires that we demonstrate that we deserve such loyalty. We must listen to what our friends and companions want and need, help them achieve their goals when we can, and be considerate, kind, and supportive in good times and bad. While this sounds obvious, most of us do not spend enough time actually doing this.

And perhaps most important, *be thankful* for great, loyal friends and companions. Show them that you appreciate them! Psychologists have conclusively proven that expressing appreciation on a regular basis is associated with a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

If we make this a way of life, great things are sure to happen. We will develop lasting loyal friendships. We will be happier! Loyal friends and companions pour themselves into us, just as we pour ourselves into them. As a result, we are filled to overflowing!

*But oh! the blessing it is to have a friend to whom one can speak fearlessly on any subject; with whom one's deepest as well as most foolish thoughts come out simply and safely. Oh, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person—having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.*

—Dinah Maria Craik, *A Life for a Life* (1859)