

Why Loyalty Matters

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

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 7

Teaching Loyalty

*The schoolroom is where loyalties
first collide.*

—George P. Fletcher, professor of
jurisprudence at Columbia University

What is it that makes a community? Geography? Race? Religion? Language? While each of these can play a role in uniting a people, they are not enough to ensure a cohesive society. A community requires a common identity.

Throughout history, it is the stories endlessly told—myth, history, poem, and song—that crystallized our view of the world and our place in it. Our ancestors were taught that they were part of something larger than themselves, that every person has value, and that we all belong. Our children must be taught this same lesson.

In his essay on loyalty, Professor George Fletcher observes,

The teaching of literature, history, and civics provides the primary vehicle for casting this common identity. Pupils must not only speak the same language, they must come to rehearse the same books and poems, cherish the same national heroes, loathe the same villains, and develop common sentiments toward their shared institutions. That is what it means to live in a common culture.

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What we are taught ultimately enables us to define who we are and our vision for society. It is these lessons that instill the values cherished by our communities. These ideals are not instinctive; they are taught. This is how we learn to be good citizens, to be contributing members of society. As such, schools are the greenhouse of a community.

Learning to Be Loyal

Benjamin Franklin believed that virtue was an art, but like most arts, virtue is not instinctive: “[One] must be taught the principles of the art, be shown all the methods of working, and how to acquire the habits of using properly all the instruments; and thus regularly and gradually he arrives, by practice, at some perfection in the art.” The truth is that we all need constant training in the art of loyalty.

Loyalty by its very nature demands that we commit ourselves to a person, group, or cause. We suppress our short-term self-interests to maintain our bond. In its most noble form, we serve a cause greater than ourselves, designed to unite with another.

Therefore, in our training to be loyal, we need to learn the real meaning of service to something greater than oneself. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate.”

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Schools can help develop the art of loyalty in our children by incorporating service to the community into the curriculum—what is referred to as “service learning.” Research on the impact of service learning shows that students who participate in high-quality programs become more civically engaged.

But simply including community service in the curriculum is not enough to instill the foundations of loyalty. This is starkly evident by the fact that sentencing someone to community service as punishment for a crime rarely instills greater loyalty to the community.

It is not enough simply to do. Instead, our children must come to understand, internalize, and cherish the virtue of doing.

Character Education

Loyalty demands maturity. While children can and do experience strong emotional ties, loyalty is the result of personal commitment. Therefore, young children cannot be expected to be loyal per se.

But young children can learn the preliminaries to loyalty such as responsibility, perseverance, and respect for others. These values are highly interrelated to loyalty and are part of the life lessons that we all expect our children to learn. As such, character education represents a critical responsibility of our schools.

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The idea that schools should focus on instilling virtues in our children is not new. In fact, it dates back to the very beginning of education. For Plato, “education in virtue is the only education which deserves the name.”

This belief that education is the conduit for a virtuous society has long been held by some of history’s greatest philosophers. English philosopher John Locke observed, “of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.”

The Founding Fathers of the United States held this same view. In fact, they rightly believed that for democracy to work, citizens must be educated and virtuous. The word *and* is critical. Education to improve the intellect of all citizens is essential but not enough. For modern democratic societies to succeed, it is essential that all children be educated, and that they be taught to cherish the values that we as a people hold dear. U.S. president and primary author of the U.S. Constitution James Madison warned, “To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without virtue in the people is a chimerical idea.”

Nonetheless, the idea that schools should seek to instill moral values is not without principled debate. Arguably, parents, not schools, should be the ultimate teachers of values to children. Without question, instilling virtues is first and foremost a parental responsibility. But U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is also correct—it takes a village to

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raise a child. She begins her book, *It Takes a Village*, by stating the inarguable truth:

Children are not rugged individualists. They depend on adults they know and on thousands more who make decisions every day that affect their well-being. All of us, whether we acknowledge it or not, are responsible for deciding whether our children are raised in a nation that doesn't just espouse family values but values families and children.

While there are legitimate points for debate in her book, the core idea advocated by Clinton is neither liberal nor conservative. As conservative radio talk show host, columnist, and author Kerby Anderson acknowledged, "At its face, there is nothing controversial about the idea that it takes more than parents to raise a child. Grandparents, friends, pastors, teachers, boy scout leaders, and many others in the community all have a role in the lives of our children."

The role of the community in raising our children is as old as civilization itself. But the need has likely never been greater. The time pressures of modern society make the challenge facing parents in the teaching of virtue to their children daunting. This is compounded by the overwhelming amount of time that children are bombarded with conflicting, sometimes violent messages. Research indicates that children spend 1,500 hours per year watching television, but less than 40 hours per year in meaningful conversation

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with their parents. These numbers point to the difficulty that parents face, and the virtual impossibility of their being able to go it alone.

By their very nature, schools play a vital role in assisting parents in overseeing children's development. Children spend approximately 900 hours per year in school. And the reality is that schools cannot function without communicating values to their students. Students must come to value honesty, integrity, cooperation, self-improvement, and learning itself if education is to have any hope of success. As Edward Wynne, professor of education at the University of Illinois, argues, "Schools are and must be concerned about pupils' morality. Any institution with custody of children or adolescents for long periods of time, such as a school, inevitably affects the character of its charges." Therefore, it is not a question of teaching morals in school but of deciding which values to instill.

Despite much publicized debate, polls consistently show that we are concerned with the values that our children are being taught. And there is actually a strong consensus about the virtues we as a people hold dear. Research finds that greater than 90 percent of us believe that children should be taught honesty, acceptance of different races and ethnicities, love of country, moral courage, and caring for friends and family in the public schools.

Similarly, teachers overwhelmingly believe that character education should be an important part of their curriculum.

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This is not surprising. Most teachers chose their professions based on lofty ideals. They wanted to make a difference in the lives of children—to help them become better people.

Sadly, all too often, teachers receive inadequate instruction in character education. This is a grave oversight. Character education is more complex than the teaching skills that we humorously refer to as the three Rs (i.e., reading, writing, arithmetic). It requires addressing personal growth. Therefore, teachers must also be given the proper training to make character education successful and a priority.

The biggest impediment, however, has been legitimizing character education in the curriculum. Beginning in the 1960s, much of the West neglected the importance of character education, instead focusing almost exclusively on the academic basics (e.g., mathematics, reading, etc.). The erosion of our cultural continuity, however, soon became apparent. As a result, there has been an awakened interest in teaching our children core values. In the United States, the Congress and President Bill Clinton formally endorsed character education, reminding schools of the importance of teaching unifying morals.

Communities, however, cannot simply lay the responsibility of instilling moral character in their children on the schools. It is vital that each community determine the values it wants to be taught in its schools. Schools, parents, and the community as a whole must collaborate on the vision, objectives, and approaches regarding the values they want taught.

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There is no escaping our own responsibility in seeing to it that our children are taught the meaning of character, i.e., the ability to *know* what is good, to *want* what is good, and to *do* good. We must support our communities' schools in this critical role. It is our duty as loyal citizens. The alternative is an unthinkable future. As U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt warned, "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."

E Pluribus Unum (Out of Many, One)

Loyalty, be it to a person, group, or cause, most typically occurs when we personally identify ourselves with the object of our loyalty. Therefore, if we wish to live in a loyal society, it is imperative that we as a people share a common identity.

Schools play a prominent role in facilitating this shared view. To quote a 1945 Harvard-commissioned study on the objective for education in a free society, "It is impossible to escape the realization that our society, like any society, rests on common beliefs and that a major task of education is to perpetuate them." This is no less true today.

What arguably is different today is the more pronounced challenge of absorbing immigrants with diverse religious and linguistic heritages in virtually every prosperous Western nation. Even in countries like the United States, with a long immigrant tradition, the subject of immigration often results in heated debate.

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While diversity clearly enriches humankind—and, in our view, is the strength of the nation—it adds significant challenges to unity. Being part of a larger community demands that we identify ourselves with it. As a result, much of the West finds itself needing to assimilate people of diverse religious and linguistic heritages into cohesive societies. Schools have traditionally been the primary catalyst for creating this unified vision of what it means to belong to a nation—to be American, English, French, etc.

In fact, this is something schools should do. One of the main reasons for the creation of public schools in the United States was the need for civic education. As Fletcher notes, “Generating a sense of common ground and shared national identity are as central to the educational mission as teaching the virtues of fair play and disciplined learning.”

The purpose, however, should not be to expunge our differences. Different is good! Rather, the goal must be to respect our differences while still seeing ourselves as one people.

The Need for Heroes

The function of the hero in art is to inspire the reader or spectator to continue in the same spirit from where he, the hero, leaves off.

—John Berger, British author and painter

He was a man without heroes. Few would regard this description as a compliment. None would wish it for an epitaph. It

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signifies the jaded outlook of a life that has been scarred and lonely. The truth is that we all need heroes—people who inspire us, people who help light the way for us through their own example. And loyal societies also need common heroes.

Our heroes are never as large to us as they are in our childhood. It is at this time we learn to dream of the world that can be, and to see ourselves in that dream. In *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, Harvard professor Josiah Royce persuasively argues the importance of these childhood idealizations to our development of virtuous loyalty:

There is one contribution which childhood . . . makes to a possible future loyalty . . . the well-known disposition to idealize heroes and adventures, to live an imaginary life, to have ideal comrades, and to dream of possible great enterprises. . . . If I had never been fascinated in childhood by my heroes and by the wonders of life, it is harder to fascinate me later with the call of duty. Loyalty . . . is an idealizing of human life, a communion with invisible aspects of our social existence. Too great literalness in the interpretation of human relations is, therefore, a foe to the development of loyalty.

It is this view that has caused some to advocate that the teaching of history be designed to promote civic loyalty. Most notably, William Galston, former deputy assistant for domestic policy to President Clinton, argues that scientific

history should be replaced with a “nobler, moralizing history: a pantheon of heroes who confer legitimacy on central institutions and are worthy of emulation.”

As we shall see, this view is not without meaningful debate. But of the need for heroes who fight for noble causes, there can be no doubt. Lonely is the man without heroes. And a community of lonely individuals is no community at all, and certainly not one worthy of loyalty.

The Need for Critical Reflection

Schools have a duty to reflect the values of society. As public institutions, their influence represents the official view of society. A sound education, however, demands that we weigh evidence and accept debate.

In fact, building a sustainable, loyal society actually requires that members of the group be able to think critically. This seems to run counter-intuitive to the need to build common identity to create a community. The key is sustainability.

Communities, like life itself, must adapt and evolve to survive. There will always be forces at play to break communities apart. We have watched the collapse of entire nations played out before our eyes as these societies ultimately broke down into smaller, more homogenous groups because they could no longer share a common vision of themselves.

The forces of disintegration become overpowering when groups in society believe that they are being treated unfairly.

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And no matter how homogeneous the society, at some point, there will be members of the group who will feel unfairly treated.

It is only through critical reflection that we can adequately address issues of equity and social justice. Without this, the majority will choose either to be blind to injustice or apologists for it.

But ignoring or excusing injustice doesn't make it go away. It only creates a disenfranchised group within society. Without serious attempts to understand and correct inequity, the threat of secession from the group, whether emotionally or physically, is ever present. With both types of succession, the cost to society as a whole is enormous.

This is a critical reason it is the truly loyal who attempt to change what economist Albert Hirschman calls an "objectionable state of affairs." We tend to forget that evils like slavery, racism, and elitism were the norm for society not so long ago. Change occurred not because it was the natural course of things, but because loyal citizens critically considered the issues and challenged conventional wisdom.

Therefore, schools must not only provide our children with knowledge; they must teach them the critical thinking skills necessary to handle the complex issues that come with maturity. Only in this way will citizens have the capacity for loyally opposing the status quo when the will of the majority actually threatens the sustainability of the community.

And it is only through critical thinking that the majority will see the value in such thinking.

Reconciling the Need for Heroes and Critical Thinking

Florida State University philosophy professor Victoria Costa argues, “educational systems can promote . . . two sorts of goals. One such goal is the production of citizens who are loyal to a particular community. Another . . . is the development of a student’s capabilities for rational inquiry directed at the pursuit of truth . . . there is a clear tension between these two goals.”

Without question, Professor Costa is correct. But it is also true that these two goals, loyal citizenship and critical reflection, are not mutually exclusive. As Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently argued:

Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction. The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals. . . . We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.

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The fact is that we need to provide our children with heroes *and* critical thinking in their education. Unfortunately, the debate seems to be between the extremes on both sides.

Free societies are legitimately mindful of their past—visions of “Hitler Youth” indoctrinations cannot, and should not, be forgotten. Similarly, we are wary of the sometimes-deadly fanaticism inculcated on impressionable youth in some schools in countries around the world today.

On the other hand, educators sometimes overemphasize the negative in our past, to a point that seemingly takes the position that history will teach us nothing except that mankind has suffered over the ages at the hands of various power-hungry despots.

Without question, history is filled with lessons in suffering. And all regimes of any size and longevity have committed acts that violate the rights we now believe inalienable to all of humankind. But the truth is also that life for the human race has never been better than it is at this very moment. And this did not happen by accident. It is the direct result of the sacrifices of many heroes of our past, without whom our ability to pursue happiness would be unimaginable. Those who advocate a completely airbrushed view of our heroes do a tremendous disservice to both our heroes and to the citizens they seek to impress. Infallibility should be left to religious avatars. By removing our heroes from the self-doubts and failings common to all of humanity, their self-sacrifice

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for the betterment of humankind is reduced to the preordained fate of supermen and superwomen. The message to our youth becomes not simply that these individuals are great, but that they are nothing like us. If they are nothing like us, then the fate of the world is someone else's problem, or worse still, unfixable by the people of today. Our heroes need to be inspirational and aspirational—otherwise, our best days will always be behind us.

Those who advocate an unvarnished view of our heroes do no less a disservice to our heroes and our citizens. All of us, no matter how great our achievements, have significant failings. Were our lives to be the sum of our failings and foibles, all of us would leave legacies of shame. Unfortunately, what is often put forth as critical thinking is in fact cynical thinking—focusing on the failings of the heroes of our past rather than highlighting their accomplishments.

For example, George Washington, the leader of the patriot forces in the American Revolutionary War and the first president of the United States, made extraordinary sacrifices in the service of creating the nation. He also owned slaves. Without question, slavery represents a great evil. Of this there can be no debate. Given all that George Washington sacrificed and accomplished to establish the United States, however, was he not a great man—a hero who should be admired by American citizens? Those who would answer that his ownership of slaves disqualifies him from being regarded as a hero stand atop a steep and slippery

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slope. Just how steep and how slippery will become readily apparent.

The Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths all share a common patriarch, Abraham. Abraham is believed by the faithful to be the forefather of the Jewish and Arab peoples, and to have had a direct dialogue with God. The sacred texts of these faiths also reveal that Abraham owned slaves. In fact, he had a child with one of these slaves. To those who practice what we have labeled as cynical thinking, are the two billion plus Jews, Christians, and Muslims to repudiate their patriarch and abandon their faith over Abraham's ownership of slaves? The answer is self-evident. Regardless of our belief or lack thereof in these faiths, the idea that Abraham's ownership of slaves disqualifies the admiration of Jews, Christians, and Muslims toward him is absurd.

The key in resolving the need for heroes and the need for critical thinking is "balanced" education. We are reminded of a eulogy given for Bruce Henderson, the founder of the Boston Consulting Group, whose contributions to the science and practice of management are still strongly felt today.

He was not always easy to deal with. My vivid recollection of those early days is that periodically some brilliant young person would come into my office and say, "Do you know what he did to me?" It was never necessary to ask to whom they were referring. I responded to each in the same way: "Look, don't think of Bruce as an ordinary

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person—Bruce is a great man. Neither his virtues nor his failings are small. Fortunately, his virtues outweigh his failings or neither of us would be here.”

So it is with all great men and women. Like us, they are filled with virtues and failings. Thankfully, most of us will leave this life with our virtues outweighing our failings. Our heroes simply do so in greater magnitude. This is what we must teach to our children, and constantly remind ourselves.

It is not simply our heroes’ strength of courage that should give us comfort but their own human frailties. It is their frailties that prove to us all that our weaknesses do not disqualify us from achieving great things. We all can be heroes if we are willing to commit ourselves to noble causes. This represents the pinnacle of loyalty—the devotion of a person to a cause that unites many as one. This is the underlying quality of our heroes. This is why loyalty ultimately matters. And it is attainable by us all.