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Book Review: Why Loyalty Matters by Timothy Keiningham and Lerzan Aksoy

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Did you know May 1st is Loyalty Day in the U.S.? It's been around since 1921, and in 1958 Congress made it an official holiday. Every president (except Nixon) has issued a Loyalty Day proclamation.

While loyalty to country used to be a given, today we question where our true loyalties lie. We hear a lot about brand loyalty and corporate loyalty, or the lack thereof, but little about loyalty in our personal relationships. Since we are each responsible for our decisions, we must at least make choices we can live with.

Why Loyalty Matters: The Groundbreaking Approach to Rediscovering Happiness, Meaning and Lasting Fulfillment in Your Life and Work, by Timothy Keiningham and Lerzan Aksoy, delves into the almost spiritual nature of our relationships where loyalty is deeply rooted in basic human trust.

Based on substantial research, the book offers a comprehensive look at loyalty in all facets of life, including relationships. It also includes a "LoyaltyAdvisor" assessment tool, available online, to help you, your family, and friends, plug in to the critical bonds that sustain your happiness and the loyalties most important to your success in relationships.

How many people are completely happy? The research conducted by Keiningham's firm, Ipsos Loyalty, reports that less than five percent of people state they are "completely satisfied with my life," largely based on conflicts surrounding the core of family, friends, and work. Maybe it's not so much the hours in a day we have, but the principle of loyalty that binds us together. We've become less loyal as our environment has required more of us. We are more flexible and mobile, and we may be doing more in a dynamic world but receiving less satisfaction.

The authors also cite high turnover in worker relationships and customers. Companies lose half their employees every four years and half their customers within five years.

As lack of loyalty seeps into our culture and relationships, we may become more selfish and opportunistic, shrinking our pool of friends. And the old idea of a nuclear family, with a mother, father, and children is also shrinking.

In 1950, 45 percent of households were considered nuclear families. Today, it is only 25 percent, with increasing divorce rates, and people who never marry.

As a result, we are "increasingly disconnected from the family-based community structures of our past."

A thorough look at our sense of loyalty requires we examine all areas of our lives, encompassing personal, economic, spiritual, and societal involvement. The authors have created what they call our "Relationship DNA," made up of these ten components:

- Leadership
- Reliance
- Empathy
- Security
- Calculativeness
- Connectedness
- Independence
- Traditionalism
- Problem-focused coping
- Emotion-focused coping

All of these factors have the potential to add a positive or negative impact on our relationships.

The bottom line in Why Loyalty Matters is that loyalty is the right strategy in all aspects of our lives. "Living a loyal life requires that we recognize the formal and implicit commitments we have made to others."

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Helen Gallagher reviews non-fiction books and shares insights when attending author and publishing events on Chicago's North Shore. She is a national speaker on technology, writing and publishing. She's a member of American Society of Journalists & Authors, and the International Women's Writing Guild. Helen is the author of "Release Your Writing: Book Publishing Your Way." www.releaseyourwriting.com. She is also a member of National Book Critics Circle.