

L - Loyalty Can be Wise or Not

Loyalty is a tricky thing. A wise person knows when loyalty is deserved and when it isn't. A wise person is loyal only to those who have earned it.

"You cannot buy loyalty; you cannot buy the devotion of hearts, minds, and souls. You have to earn these things."

— Clarence Francis, former Chairman of the Board for General Foods

When we think of loyalty, most of us think in terms of friendships. I surveyed my friends about what loyalty is and received numerous replies, all involving being true to someone. They included phrases like, "Loving faithfully and fiercely even in the midst of hard times." According to the book of Samuel in the Old Testament, during the reign of King Saul, Jonathan, his son, and David developed a friendship and loyalty that surpassed even Jonathan's relationship with his father.

Loyalty in a troubled marriage can be paralyzing. People who remain in abusive relationships may be misplacing loyalty to an undeserving partner. In some cases, distorted loyalty is dangerous.

As a kid I thought loyalty in friendship was a given until my best friend betrayed me. The pain I experienced was new to me. I was naive and didn't know that not everyone has the same loyalty in relationships that I had. I learned that loyalty is earned, not given like a party favor.

I recall parents when I was an educator, who thought they should be loyal to a misbehaving child rather than insisting the child owned his/her wrong-doing. That is not loyalty. It is egocentric denial.

Another memory is learning how labor unions worked and what it meant to “cross the picket line.” I saw a conflict of loyalties between caring for family and being a loyal union member.

People get confused about loyalty to our country, even to our flag. Our military commits to loyalty. We need that kind of loyalty in order to have a safe nation. We also need to recognize that the people who hold office in Washington are not necessarily honest representatives of our whole nation.

Loyalty to the Nation all the time, loyalty to the Government when it deserves it.

–Mark Twain

Loyalty to a group can go all wrong. Devotees become part of the movement and lose sight of the truth. Misplaced loyalty is dangerous. “True Believers” think they are being loyal when, in fact, they are fanatical and part of a movement that causes harm, such as, revolutions, civil wars, the Crusades and the Third Reich. (Read *True Believers* by Eric Hoffer) In the recent riots people completely lost sight of the issues and compounded the problems they were rebelling against, not demonstrating loyalty to their cause.

People light-heartedly say she “drank the Kool-Aid” without recalling where the phrase originated. Most are probably too young. It became a phrase for being loyal when it was certainly not wise to do so.

Jim Jones was an American cult leader who moved his congregation to Guyana where, in 1978 he ordered and likely coerced a mass suicide and mass murder of 918 commune members with cyanide-poisoned Kool-Aid. So “drinking the Kool-Aid” has become the catch phrase for following blindly or maintaining loyalty even to the most horrid of leaders. There is nothing light-hearted about it.

Knowing when to be loyal is wise. The wise person is loyal with care.