

# Developing Relationship Loyalty

by Murray Parker

If challenging economic conditions have you examining internal practices and exploring all possible avenues to enhance performance, have you considered the role of your organization's relationships; the very connective tissue by which your business functions? Is relationship loyalty where you want it to be with.... employees, customers, suppliers, partners, directors, financial institutions or regulatory bodies?

If not, the good news is that you can achieve dramatic improvement by changing only your side of the relationship. Change what you can control and the rest will follow.

Consider how this story illustrates the principles discussed below.

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death. The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life.

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel.

"Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," the farmer replied proudly. "I'll make you a deal. Let me provide him with the level of education my own son will enjoy. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of." And that he did.

Farmer Fleming's son attended the very best schools and in time, he graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia. What saved his life this time? Penicillin. The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Of course there are many such stories that illustrate the rewards of personal integrity, of doing something that counts and for reaching out to go the extra mile. Certainly you don't have to rescue someone from a bog to earn loyalty from a relationship. Nor as it turns out, do you have to become a friend.

From years of practical consulting experience, author Andrew Sobel suggests that relationship loyalty is dependent upon three factors:

1. Value
2. Trust
3. The Extra Mile

Analysis of your critical business relationships relative to these factors may offer new insight and heretofore-untracked paths for business improvement.

**Value:** Value added, rather than friendship, is the starting point for relationship loyalty. Does this individual consistently help me improve my business and achieve the objectives we've set out? Is each employee contributing as expected? Are we maximizing our value to customers, shareholders and our communities? Are we effectively monitoring the value we add to our organization's relationships?

**Trust:** Many professionals can add value, however, loyalty increases dramatically when there is both value and trust. Trust begins to elevate you from being a "mercenary" or "vendor" to someone who is part of the inner circle. Others' trust in you extends beyond their belief that you will do good work—it is a deeper, broader trust based on both professional competence *and* personal integrity.

**The Extra Mile:** Your willingness to go the "extra mile" is a final element of the loyalty equation. Do you come through when things are difficult? Do you demonstrate that you actually care, beyond the dollars that are exchanged, about the welfare of your customer, supplier or partner? As many have said before:

What goes around comes around.  
Work like you don't need the money.  
Love like you've never been hurt.  
Dance like nobody's watching.  
Sing like nobody's listening.  
Live like it's Heaven on Earth.

Since people are the single most important resource in your organization, it follows that relationships are the means by which success happens; the grease that lubricates the wheel of progress. For an avenue to improve performance that is independent of economic factors and completely under your control take a close look at your relationships and consider transforming your practices to foster loyal relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sobel is the leading authority on client relationships and the skills and strategies required to earn enduring client loyalty. His highly acclaimed books, *Making Rain* and *Clients for Life*, are considered the definitive guides to creating broad-based, long-term, trusted relationships.

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Prior to founding Borton Wallace, Murray spent 10 years in product development, marketing, sales and sales management. While employed by Dupont Co. he developed several new products, generated two patents and developed several new multimillion-dollar markets.