

Loyalty



Aeneas carries his father and son out of Troy ⁸

Did you suppose, my father,
That I could tear myself away and leave you?
Unthinkable; how could a father say it?
Now if it pleases the powers about that nothing
stand of this great city; if your heart
is set on adding your own death and ours
to that of Troy, the door's wide open for it.

- Aeneas to his father Anchises

The Aeneid, Book II, Virgil. ⁶

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Introduction

As I sit here and begin writing my thoughts on loyalty, I reflect on the fact that by the time my senior grading arrives I will be 40 years of age. I must admit that physically things are a bit tougher some days, but mentally I feel grateful for a life full of wonderful experience and opportunity. As someone who is strongly devoted to my God, to my own spirituality, philosophies and ideals, to my family and friends, and to my Taekwon-Do, I feel that I have license to be able to speak about being loyal with some authority, be it somewhat personal and tainted by my own unique experiences.

Loyalty as a concept is extremely complex, some argue that it can only be given between people and that it is a trait that is solely interpersonal. In many circumstances, I can see how this can make a lot of sense. If you take a moment to think upon your own connections to our organisation, would your loyalties be as strong if the people who had been there with you from the start, one day, just disappeared? I think of this often in my workplace. My connection and love for the De La Salle Christian Brothers, breeds in me an intense loyalty and a pseudo-filial devotion. Is my loyalty attached to place or to person? The emotions that surround my loyalty here are difficult to express in words, as is answering the question. So, I hope, that like me, you appreciate that loyalty is not a concept that is clear cut or as simple as a dictionary definition.

That is why I provide you with no Webster's Dictionary entry on the subject. This would do the concept of loyalty a true disservice.

When I became aware that I needed to write on loyalty, I grew intrigued with the idea, what it means to society and communities, and then in turn how I fitted into the picture. I needed an approach, so I settled on the following strategy:

1. Society worldwide is heavily influenced by the writings of various religions and their Holy Books. What have they got to say on the topic of loyalty?
2. People themselves have got their own unique perspectives on loyalty. By using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) I will interview a cross section of society and then compare and contrast their responses for some insight into what loyalty means to them.
3. Taking stock of my findings, I will see how the discovered information sits within my own experience, personal views and Taekwon-Do.

충성

Korean Hangul – Loyalty ⁷

Religion pervades society. Even those that call themselves atheists usually follow some type of moral code. In western society that moral code is based on a Christian value system that dates back thousands of years to the Book of the Old Testament and even further. In the East, beliefs are supported by the Veda's in Hinduism and the writings of Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed and other great prophets depending on the particular flavour of religious belief that a faithful person prescribes to. All these ancient writings reflect the basic need for human guidance and provide the framework from which people can live a good and righteous life.

The following are referenced excerpts from various belief systems that reflect on loyalty:

The Qu'ran

The Prophet Mohammed said, 'When you meet him, salute him. When he calls you, respond to him. When he seeks advice, give him advice. When he falls ill, visit him. When he dies, follow him as you bear his body.'¹

The Bible

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." Ruth 1:16-17²

The Torah

"Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he has not another to help him up" Ecclesiastes - 4:9-10³

Confucian Philosophy

"Show love, respect and support; display courtesy; uphold fraternity among brothers; wisely advise one's friends, including dissuading them from moral unrighteousness; display sorrow for their sickness and death"⁴. (Note: It is Confucian Philosophy and neo-Confucianism that heavily influences General Choi Hong Hi's Philosophy of Taekwon-Do and his concepts surrounding moral culture).

Maori Spirituality

"A family is like a tree, where the trunk is your ancestors, and there are many branches, and you are one of them. If one of the branches dies, there is support from all the branches around. The Māori word for loyalty is *pono*, or *piripono*, and it is very important; we expect it from all of our family. In terms of supporting what is right, the heart (*aroha*) is also very important."⁵

Maori pounamu in a triple twist (bonding / joining for life)⁹



As can be seen, regardless of religion or system of belief there are common threads running through each of the previous excerpts. Most significantly though, it is clear from all the readings that the loyalty in question is truly of the interpersonal type. It is about an unwavering devotion to someone you care for deeply. Devotion built on love, trust, respect and a willingness to forgive where others would not. When I think upon these words; the idea of family leaps strongly into focus.

I pose the following questions for you to reflect on - Is loyalty to others comparable to making them like an adopted family member? Do you then give of yourself to the same degree? Do they assume the role of honorary brothers / sisters / fathers / mothers? Does the fraternity of ITF Taekwon-Do breed this type loyalty?

This I believe is certainly possible to a large extent. When I reflect on my loyalties to others, often this is the case and I feel the connection we have is family like in its substance. I share my life with them as I would a family member. Like family, they are well aware of my hopes, dreams, and aspirations and as such, both parties feel very much entwined in the lives of the other.

But to what depth would this shared loyalty extend?

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." **John 15:13**¹⁰

I wonder if this statement would hold fast for many of us if the time came to make such a decision. A loyalty as deep as this could only be truly tested if the reality was made concrete and we were faced with the resolution that a life had to be given to save another. In staying with the context of family, I am also reminded of the old adage, *"Blood is thicker than water"* and understand fully the commitment and complete loyalty that Aeneas has for his father Anchises in the book of the Aeneid (see the quote on cover page). Refusing utterly his father's request to leave him behind, Aeneas chooses to stay and thus is also likely choosing death as the City of Troy heads towards total destruction by the invading Greeks. For family, loyalty is absolute.

*"The strength of a family, like the strength of an army,
is in its loyalty to each other."* - **Mario Puzo, The Family**¹¹



Family Image¹³

In society today, many argue that moral culture is virtually non-existent and it certainly appears that way if we were to take the daily newspapers and television reporting as our guide. I choose to take the opposing argument though and say that it is alive and well, albeit slightly more hidden than it was in ages past. Values such as integrity, empathy, kindness and loyalty are still held with high esteem and the majority of people in society still believe and uphold these values plus many others. It is just a shame that media reports on and overshadows the good around us with the excessive and often needless reporting of stories that grab the headlines and make for strong ratings.

In regards to loyalty, I seek to understand how members of society today feel about it and I wish to understand their perspectives on being loyal. To accomplish this, I created a survey using "SurveyMonkey.com" and sent it to the following people:

- Mr. Nevan Percy – Lawyer, Associate Partner, Kevin McDonald Ltd.
- Mr. Brendan Doogan – 4th Degree Black ITKD, friend and work colleague.
- Mr. Brendan Schollum – Past Principal Aquinas College Tauranga and Sacred Heart Auckland.
- Br. Patrick Lynch – CEO of the NZ Catholic Schools Office, Wellington.
- Br. Steve Hogan – Principal, Lasalle College, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
- Mr. Ajinesh Kumar – Assistant Head of Science, De La Salle College, Mangere.
- Fr. Brian Prendeville – Saint John the Evangelist, Parish Priest, Otara.
- Ms. Mary Chapman-Laidlaw – School Counsellor, De La Salle College, Mangere.
- Mr. Dennis Tang – Board of Governors, St. Josephs Institution International, Singapore.
- Mr. Don Leong – 2nd Degree Black Belt ITKD, my student and Ford NZ Territory Brand Manager.
- Mr. Afi Meleisea – 2nd Degree Black Belt ITKD, my student and Manager In-Flight Operations Air NZ.
- Mr. Harley North – Police Officer and brother, Waihi.
- Ms. Courtney Meleisea – 3rd Degree Black Belt ITKD and my student.
- Master Steve Pellow – 7th Degree Black Belt ITKD.
- Master Mahesh Bhana – 7th Degree Black Belt ITKD and whom I now consider my Instructor.

The questions asked through the survey were:

1. How would you define the concept of being loyal?
2. Using your own life experiences, give an example of where you have seen or see loyalty in action.
3. How important is the concept of loyalty to you personally?
4. If you could use just three descriptive words to explain the concept of loyalty, what would they be?
5. Would you be so kind to name something you are loyal to and give a brief explanation why?

All surveys were completely anonymous and no names were attached to any particular answer or response. When feeding back on the following pages, I have removed any response that may have hinted at the respondent's identity. This is done out of absolute respect for those involved and in thanks for their sharing of personal information.

Question 1: How would you define the concept of being loyal?

Loyalty is showing respect and an alliance towards one thing, idea or person. Being loyal is like being true to yourself and sticking to one idea or with one person and/or group.

Being true to your friends and to your convictions despite any criticism

Being loyal, is aligning yourself to someone and/or something that you personally have very strong belief in and supporting that person.

Loyalty means being faithful to and supportive of the aims and culture of an organisation, or person/family

Acting with integrity, commitment and honour in relation to an ideal epitomized in a set of relationships

Behaving and displaying love, honesty, integrity and respect every day to the people that you value in your life, or to a cause that you believe in.

Staying true; not abandoning a person thing or organisation without a damn good reason; being there for people in their time of need; forgiving small things for the overall good in someone/thing; sticking by what you believe in difficult times...

Loyalty is an aspect of integrity - unconditional support.

Loyalty involves putting another interest, goal, principle or person ahead of your own desires or needs.

A person who you can trust and a person who is trusting

It's about building a relationship with someone then giving & receiving fair & honest treatment to each other. It's a two way street.

Loyalty is like someone supporting you, or someone devoted to you.

Being honest and true to your beliefs, family and friends.

Question 2: Using your own life experiences, give an example of where you have seen or see loyalty in action.

I see loyalty in action at different clubs, where all members are loyal to their instructor. Not because they have to but because they want to.

Someone constantly respecting others and keeping calm and objective even when provoked because the organisation has a value of respect

The most obvious example I can think of is my marriage. Our relationship is built on trust. Being loyal to each other and the oath. Supporting one another in good times and times of trouble.

Sticking by a friend - despite what others may say - the distance in geography - being supportive of their choices in life

Simple example of mine is going back to the same petrol station because of the friendly and helpful staff even though the cost may be a little more than other places.

Absolutely supporting a friend or colleague who is unjustly treated by others in a work setting

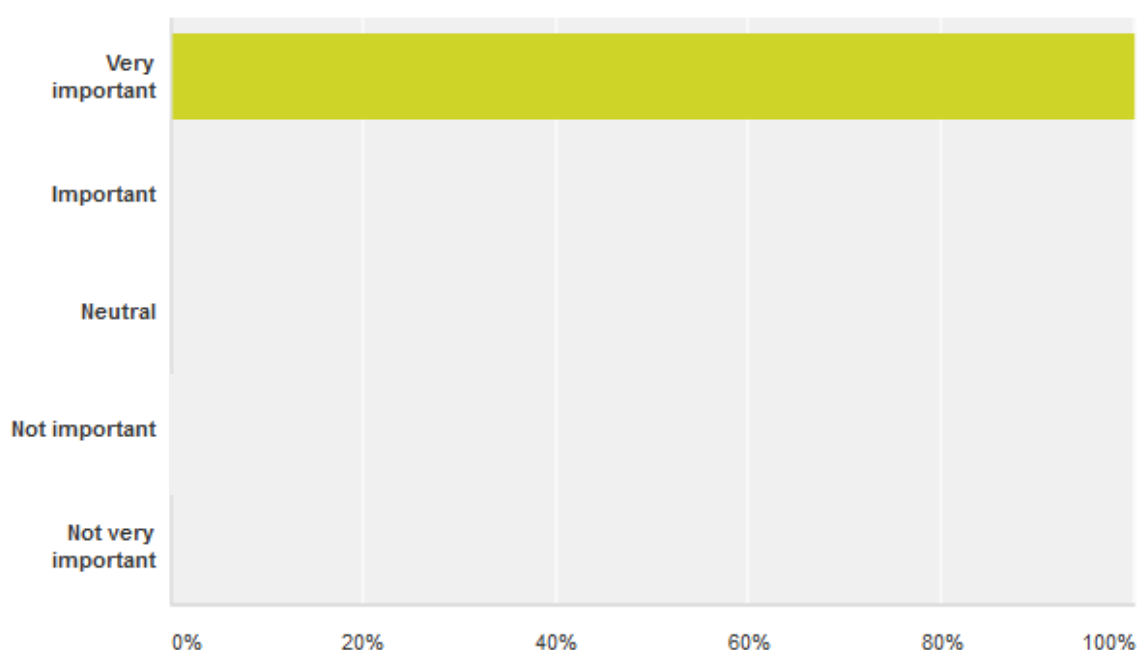
I have seen loyalty when friends step up when their mate was under personal challenge - just being there. Australians call this mate-ship.

By being supported and loved by loyal friends, family, partner or wife when mistakes have been made or in times of hardship. These people have stood by through the tough times and have been there for support and to offer help.

I have seen loyalty in action through my years of training in TKD. I have seen people chop and change instructors and trainers because they are following a trend or believe they will go further under someone else and forget about who helped them to begin with.

In business, the relationship between customers and suppliers. In sport, our relationship with our coaches and team members.

Question 3: How important is the concept of loyalty to you personally?



Question 4: If you could use just three descriptive words to explain the concept of loyalty, what would they be?



Wordle.com generated image ¹²

A Wordle image displays a word list as a graphical image. The varying size of each word displayed is in direct relation to how many times it appears in the list. The larger the word appears, the more times that word was selected by those interviewed.

Question 5: Would you be so kind to name something you are loyal to and give a brief explanation why?

I am loyal to my family because they are the people who have been with through everything like the saying goes, "blood is thicker than water".

My electrician. He has worked for us for 30+ years but is often not in the best of health. But in saying that he has never let us down when it really counts. His price is fair his work first class, he is absolutely honest and I would rather wait for him than hire someone else.

I am loyal to my mum, because she is my mum and no one or thing can ever change that. I am loyal to my wife & kids and grandkids to ensure they are safe and well. I am loyal to my sisters & brothers to make sure they are safe & well. I am loyal to my extended family.

My wife (got to be! This relationship binds the family together, built on trust.) My profession: through my actions, I get satisfaction that I have justified my position.
(Faithful)

I am loyal to my partner and my children because they are loyal to me, they are my family and I will always support them regardless of their life decisions and choices throughout life. I would gladly sacrifice everything for them with no regrets.
That is loyalty to me.

I am loyal to the mission of the institution I belong to. I stand by it as a guardian of the truths for which it stands for.

Friends. I say this because friends are precious, rare, and are something to be treasured. Friendship cannot exist without loyalty.

Community, because there are people there, and people are the manifestation of my inner loyalty and conviction.

My family, friends, workplace and art. Because I love them.

In the work place I seek to be loyal to those who employ me and those I serve

I am sure you will agree that the responses are very uplifting and heartening. Considering that the comments represent a wide cross section of society, I feel strongly supported in regards to my own views on the concept of loyalty.

To be loyal requires much of the individual; it takes real personal sacrifice, because when it boils down to it loyalty is about putting others before yourself or your own needs. It is when you put your own interests aside for a time and the needs of another person, cause or organisation are placed first. This idea for me is embodied in the idea of service. Especially service without expectation of a reward of any kind. I believe the majority of our Instructors are like this, often sacrificing family and time to serve their students and their organisation well.

To be loyal requires you to know exactly why you are being loyal. I believe you must devote the time and energy to know the needs of the person or organisation who are the recipients of your loyalty. It is no good to be a blind follower who has a senseless devotion to a cause that they do not even understand. What do you stand / fight for? Why is their cause a true and just one that deserves your support? Why are they worth the sacrifice of time and effort? What is the bond or tie that holds you so close? These are just a few questions that an individual must be able to answer. If not, are they feeling loyalty or are they just stumbling along visionless with a sadly misplaced devotion?

As important, is your ability to place your loyalties on your "life scales". Most of us have more than one commitment, devotion or vocation that we are loyal to. Like Aeneas deciding to stay by his Father's side, we too will be faced with decisions that test the strength and order of significance of our own personal loyalties. It is during these times that we must weigh up the costs and benefits that our chosen loyalties provide.

"Friendship is held to be the severest test of character. It is easy, we think, to be loyal to a family and clan, whose blood is in your own veins." - **Charles Alexander Eastman**¹⁴

Using your "life scales" allows you to find balance within all of your different life spheres, whether this is personal, family, religion, sport or any other obligation of loyalty. Poor balance and dedicating too much time to any one sphere can result in negative influences on family, friends and even your day to day health and wellbeing. This personal balance is one of the most essential components to giving your loyalty; it ensures the loyalties sustainability and the degree to which it continues to be given. As seniors in our organisation, I believe this balance is extremely important for us. To keep serving the organisation well, we must achieve this balance very early on and work to maintain it at a level of 'fitness' that is both beneficial to the recipient and to the giver.

"Loyalty given should be loyalty earned." I believe it is not an unfair expectation to anticipate some type of loyalty in return if you yourself have continuously been loyal to family, a cause, work or an organisation. This is not an ideal based on selfish principles but more one based on a practical and logical premise. If my own loyalty is to remain strong, if I am going to be committed to a cause or if I am going to continue to give to an organisation, I in turn need to know that those I give my loyalty to reciprocate in kind. This builds my passion, my drive, and my willingness to serve and strengthens my loyalty even further as time goes by.

I am loyal to many things. Like most others - God and family make the top two.

Faithfulness to these is an absolute and has no boundaries or limits to its extent.

My job as a teacher is a true vocation, not a job. Through teaching, I am faithful to the ideals of my College Founder – John Baptist de La Salle. My loyalty to him is in my daily actions in the classroom and with my interactions with my students.

After nearly 25 years of Taekwon-Do, I am faithful to the ideals and vision of General Choi Hong Hi. It is a deep loyalty born out of respect, an adherence to his dream, an admiration for his genius and a connection to others who share the same path. Taekwon-Do, with its inclusivity and borderless philosophy that allows everyone to participate, equates to me, to a world that is destined to survive and flourish. If only others could so easily see what the General was trying to establish through Taekwon-Do. What a world it would be!

No misplaced loyalties here. No blind devotion. Just faithfulness, and trust and love in spheres that deserve every ounce of my being.

I think have found the balance.

Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens.

- J. R. R. TOLKIEN, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Rantawa'. The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'K' and a long, sweeping underline.

Head Instructor

Dragon's Spirit Taekwon-Do

ITKD

1st October 2013

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