

Loyalty

I was impressed by the following news story today:

A visually-impaired dad in the US has lauded the "loyalty and courage" of his guide dog after it died while saving the life of his four-year-old son.

Dave Furukawa was walking his son Will to school in Atlanta, along with his dog, Simon, when a car ran through a red light and struck the dog.

Despite suffering fatal injuries in the impact, witnesses said the dog instantly turned and knocked the boy out of the way of the vehicle.

"What people have said is that Simon either got up or jumped out, and pushed my son out of the path of the car," Furukawa told WXIA-TV.

"This is true loyalty and courage." Reported in Atlanta, USA 30 Sept 2013.

This story reminded me of the loyalty of Ahn Joong Gun who sacrificed his life pursuing the independence of Korea against Japanese rule. It reminded me of the loyalty of Po Eun and Admiral Yi Soon Sin. These are examples of a loyalty to a cause that one pursues knowing that the action results in the sacrifice of your life. Giving your life is the ultimate sacrifice of loyalty to King or Queen, country or a belief.

There are also examples of what might be called misplaced loyalty reflected in our pattern meanings such as General Yoo Sin who followed his King's orders and fought against his own people.

Blind loyalty is not generally a good type of loyalty. Loyalty needs to be reasoned. In the dog's case he did the right thing, he did what he was trained to do, but Simon is a guide dog. Simon acted without really thinking and for that Will is forever grateful. In my opinion blind loyalty is acting without thinking. As instructors we must do more than that. We must at least enquire and satisfy ourselves that our loyalty is correctly placed.

If, and when an organisation has to demand loyalty then it is time to reflect on the culture and values of the organisation. It is time to reflect on how the organisation has treated its members. If fault lies in the organisation then can we label the departing members as disloyal? If upon reflection, the organisation believes it is on the correct path then it must not waver its values and standards. In this instance leaders should remind members that belonging has value and that loyalty is a criteria for belonging.

There are always at least two view points to an event or an action. Let's take the story of General Choi Yong, who was a great general loyal to the then King of Chosun (now Korea). He chose to stick with his King only to be defeated and executed by what could be called a rebel faction. The leader of this faction, General Yi Song-Gye became the first king of the Yi dynasty. This dynasty would rule Chosun for over 500 years until the Japanese annexation of Korean and overthrow of the Korean monarchy in the early 20th century.

By all accounts, General Choi Yong was a man of impeccable integrity, a great military leader, and a humble servant. How did it happen that he was executed by the forerunner of the greatest dynastic monarchy in Chosun history? Did Choi Yong just choose the wrong side to be loyal to? Do we label General Yi Song-Gye as a traitor? To betray your King, is that not the epitome of disloyalty. Yi Song-Gye became the first King of the Yi Dynasty. The Yi dynasty was a period of peace and prosperity. This period saw a revival of the arts and flourishing of Neo-Confucian philosophy as well as major advancements in science and medicine. So in 1388, we have two General's at a crucial cross roads, each with a loyalty to a cause, so strong that should one fail they would pay with their life. Who is right?

I have long held the belief that outside mathematical proofs there are no absolute truths. When we feel someone has been disloyal to us do we immediately denounce them? Or do we first reflect on our behaviour. Do we ask ourselves have we behaved with integrity, made decisions with the right motives, for the good of the group or for our own selfish motives?

Therefore I believe that loyalty is a subjective value. It can only be viewed subjectively, based on one's beliefs and morals. It must also be viewed in the context of the surrounding events and morals of society at the particular point in time.

As a student and an instructor, loyalty to your instructor is a common topic of consideration.

For me, there is always sadness at leaving an instructor. In Korean philosophy they say the teachers are the parents who educate you. I consider myself a very loyal subject and student, and always loyal to my instructor. However, the instructor who taught me Chon Ji, was different to the one who oversaw my first dan grading, and again different for my second dan grading, and 3rd dan and 4th dan. Just viewing my record could appear that I have been haphazard with my loyalty. It could appear that I am fleeting or disloyal. My life journey is such that I have moved cities often and lived in many different places. In my heart I remain loyal to each of my instructors. In my thoughts I have not abandoned my instructors, even though I can no longer train with them. I will always remember and be grateful to the instructor who taught me my first pattern, Chon Ji. I remain acknowledging of all those who have taught me through my dan grades, especially in their capacity as my instructor.

Now I am an instructor I can understand why some students leave. If I have taught them properly they should not feel guilty if they must leave, but they should remember my teachings and carry some loyalty with them in their own life journey.

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