



Stand by Me

by JUDY BERANGER

“... every dream we hope to accomplish in this life is going to be with and through our loyal relationships with others.”

Stand By Me

*When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we'll see
No I won't be afraid, no I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand by me. (Ben E. King)*

Who is it that stands by you, no matter what? Who is it that you can depend on to be there regardless of circumstance – someone you know is always in your court, willing to help carry the load? In your home/family/work/community life – who are the people you can depend on and trust? Name them and keep them sacred and acknowledged. Loyalty is one of the greatest gifts we can receive and being loyal is one of the greatest gifts we can give.

With the uncertainties and changes of this past school year, loyalty has been tested and conflict of loyalties has arisen. However, for some loyalty has been strengthened. Teachers have had to respond to a myriad of challenges – reassignments, school closings, talks on teacher contracts, to retire or not, board amalgamation – what does it mean, what is it going to mean?

I find that maintaining my focus on “what” and “whom” I want to be loyal to enables me to reduce my stress. The principal promised me I could change grades this year and as it turns out it changed – but not to what I wanted. This was a real test of my loyalty to my principal. We both won as I decided that it wasn't so bad. As a result I have enjoyed this summer and am mentally prepared for the new challenge. (High School Teacher)

What is loyalty?

To quote a wise teacher: “loyalty is knowing that someone will stand by you with unwavering support and trust.” Loyalty is about being committed to your family, friends, colleagues, school and systems – not

just when times are good but more especially when things get tough.

Definitions of loyalty include faithfulness, devotion, commitment or obligation to a person, group or country. Loyalty has also been characterised as tender acts of being there for others even when you don't want to be! It is about trusting confidences and protecting the name and integrity of another at every opportunity even if it means standing alone. As a noun it includes: faithfulness, commitment, allegiance, reliability, fidelity, dependability, trustworthiness, steadfastness, trustiness and true-heartedness.

One thing I know for sure is that no matter what happens in my life you will always stand by me. I know I can show up on your doorstep and be welcomed!! I'll have a home while you are alive, no matter what! (A teacher to her older sister)

Over 100 years ago Napoleon Hill conducted the first large scale study of success. He found that “lack of loyalty” was the leading cause of failure in all walks of life while maintaining loyal relationships equated with life success. More recently Keiningham and Aksoy, in their book, *Why Loyalty Matters* (www.whylongalymatters.com) remind us that every dream we hope to accomplish in this life is going to be with and through our loyal relationships with others.

I supported Helen, a new teacher, kept her in the loop and for the first term everything was great. By second term Helen had aligned with two particular teachers who were quite negative. As Helen started complaining about every little thing I felt my loyalty wavering. I decided to talk to her about this even though it was difficult. Things are improving and I am pleased I did not give up. It is not about how many friends we have; but rather how many of those you can count on. I wanted to be one she could count on. (A fellow teacher)

Experiencing and giving loyalty is energizing and a great antidote to dispelling the fear that often feeds and heightens anxiety. It is difficult to spend much

time in the throes of anxiety when one is concentrating on how and to whom they wish to practice their loyalty skills.

The strength of a family can be monitored by its loyalty to each other. *When my parents became ill I was surprised that family members, who I thought would be there to help, were not, while others from whom we expected very little demonstrated great acts of loyalty and compassion.* (Teacher who is in a caregiving role with her parents.)

*If the sky that we look upon
Should tumble and fall*

*I won't cry, I won't cry, no I won't shed a tear
Just as long as you stand by me*

Animals can be rich examples of loyalty. Most of us know stories where animals, like humans, have a sixth sense of knowing who to trust and who not to trust and when to provide comfort. When I was in grade school my Grandfather's good friend, Jim, had a massive heart attack and died while at work in the family business. Jim's dog and loyal companion Bismarck, was at his side and the only one he would let near the body was my Grandfather with whom he was familiar and trusted. Bismarck knew that my Grandfather was also loyal to Jim.

Loyalty Skills

Loyalty impacts our happiness at work. A landmark Ipsos study on loyalty – the most comprehensive study of loyalty ever conducted – found that employees with the highest levels of loyalty characterized themselves as the happiest.

Loyalty skills cited in the research and their application for teachers include:

- **Support/assistance.** Support to colleagues such as sharing expertise, contacts, lessons plans, research, covering off on duty, anything that might feel supportive and keep stress at bay.
- **Giving time/attention.** Taking an interest in the overall school challenges and projects supporting to the degree that you can, demonstrating empathy, and “standing by” your colleagues, school, and leadership.
- **Recognition/encouragement.** Valuing and appreciating all that is good along with a thank-you. Remember there are lots of us who think all kinds of good things about others but crazy as it may seem, people are more likely to say the negative out loud more quickly than acknowledging the positive. Be a cheerleader.
- **Self-sacrifice/commitment.** Teachers are incredibly loyal in their commitment to do what it takes

to get the job done. They stay late, do the dreaded duties with a smile and stand up for the sometimes unpopular viewpoints of students, other teachers and administration. There is always someone willing to put themselves out for others.

• **Reliability/trust.** Following through on what you say you'll do. Others know that you are consistently dependable to confide in and lean on.

As another school year commences it is helpful to name who it is you want to emulate this year. Who do you experience as an exemplary model of loyalty? Consider discussing what loyalty means to you as a staff at one of your staff meetings.

Some years ago there was a story from the Special Olympics, where nine contestants assembled at a starting line for the 100 yard dash. They all started out together, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish. One boy stumbled, fell and started to cry. Hearing this, the other eight slowed down, turned around, saw what had happened and went back. One special Olympian helped him up, kissed him and said, “that will make you better.” Then all nine of them linked, arm in arm and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood and cheered for more than ten minutes. Talk about loyalty!

Find a loyalty mantra and repeat it especially when life presents the negatives. Some days when you only have one nerve left – just getting ignored by someone can be enough to set you off. Name some of the people in your life you trust to be there no matter what. It could be something as short and easy as: No matter what happens to me today I know that Greg, Ann, Peter and Mark (insert your names) will always be there for me, will stand by me no matter what! Repeat that sentence often, know how absolutely true it is and feel the support throughout your whole body. It is a good mantra for you to repeat often when you feel alone or depleted of energy and you want to stay away from the negative at work. This helps with staying focused on what you can control. That is really the secret. Let go of what you cannot control and when it enters your thoughts, let it go again and repeat the mantra. If you can't think of one person, call EAP and we will help.

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