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The Psychological Strategy to Gain Ironclad Loyalty: Never Lose an Employee, Customer, Client, or Patient Again

“An ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness.”

—Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915)

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What is it that makes someone stick by you, even in the darkest hour, while others run for the hills at the slightest hint that something has gone wrong?

Research shows that an unwavering sense of loyalty can, in fact, be instilled in almost anyone by applying a basic psychological strategy. Whether it's a vendor, employee, or coworker, you can make anyone more loyal—to you, your company, or your cause—faster and more easily than you may have thought possible.

You already know the basics: Communicate with your employees and customers at every opportunity, have an open-door policy and offer encouragement and praise, and have frequent face-to-face meetings, either one-on-one or as a small group. Now we'll discover how to take your skill in creating an unshakable allegiance to an entirely new level.

Loyalty Is in the Cards

Jupiter Research reports that today, more than 75 percent of consumers have at least one loyalty card, and the number of consumers with two or more such cards is estimated to be one-third of the shopping population.

Strategy 1: Bring Him in on the Inside

A person's loyalty is determined by which side of the fence he assumes he's on. If you bring him to your side and make him *part of your team*, he will fight your battles with you and against the other guys. To turn an outsider into an insider, you need to do two things. The first is to give him information that few people have, so he feels elite and special. The second is to give him some degree of power and authority within your organization or team.

For example, let's say that a sales manager has a salesperson whose loyalty is questionable. During a relaxed, private conversation, the manager might say something such as this: "*Chris, I want you to know that there are going to be some changes around here. The most important one is that we're close to acquiring the XYZ account. Now this is not public yet, so I need to count on your discretion.*"

Once Chris agrees readily, the manager then asks him to take the reins of an aspect of the plan: "*And we think you'd be a key person on the team to figure out how we can best service them.*" In this moment, Chris just became a major player on the inside, with a little bit of power, and you've just helped to create one of your strongest supporters.

You can even put your customers to work for you and thereby ensure their continued loyalty by conveying something such as: "*We're restructuring our customer service department, and we would love you to help evaluate how our inquiries are being handled. Based in part on your feedback, we'll be able to assess how effective the changes have been.*"

The client will not only appreciate your valuing his input and feedback but also soon feel personally vested and connected to your company. You further solidify his loyalty by asking him to review (a task that shouldn't take more than 10 minutes) monthly customer service feedback reports.

Strategy 2: A Part of Greatness

How people identify with their favorite sports teams is revealing. When their teams win, they say, "*We won!*" but when they lose, it's often "*They lost!*" We all want to be part of something great, to be with someone great, and to attach ourselves to a winner. To inspire loyalty, let others see the greatness *within you*.

The quickest way to lose someone's loyalty is to be perceived as dishonest or untrustworthy. Even if the person does not like what you have to say, your truthfulness speaks volumes, communicating an important message: *that you can be trusted*. Regardless of anything else, people will take their chances with someone who is principled before they will sign on with someone who tells them what they want to hear or who tries to cover up.

A Lawyer Who Never Loses

Having never lost a single case, legendary trial attorney Gerry Spence was hired to defend a man whose alleged crime had been splashed across every newspaper in town. An overwhelming majority of townsfolk had already decided on his guilt. During jury selection, most prospective jurors insisted that while they knew of the case, they could nonetheless remain impartial. Given the skewed media attention, the seasoned attorney concluded that they were probably insincere. He decided to take his chances with a jury who felt his client was guilty and stated that they *could not be fair*. Why? Because they were honest. He had something to work with—people of integrity. The verdict: not guilty on all counts.

You can develop an ardent sense of loyalty by being known as someone who does what is right, even when an easier course of action is apparent and readily available. Therefore, always be honest in your dealings, and *never sacrifice the truth*. This illuminates fine character like a beacon in a fog of phonies.

Your integrity can illustrate itself in a variety of ways. For instance, if you are playing a game with colleagues, and a disagreement ensues over who is right, *take a position that is unfavorable to you*. Long after the game is forgotten, you will be known as the person who took the high road, even though it was not in your best interest. People will seek you out and want to be a part of what you do. By the way, since we are speaking of integrity, be sure that your position, although unfavorable to you, is genuine. You do not want to manufacture circumstances so that you can appear a certain way. Rather, where such situations arise naturally, be aware, so that you can maximize your ability to garner loyalty.

Let's take another example. If your client wants to do something that is not really in his best interest but that is advantageous to you—for example, in terms of a contract, commission, or billable

hours—and you explain to him how and why it is not in his best interest (and perhaps suggest a less costly route), you will have gained a client for life.

How much greater loyalty do you feel for a mechanic or a dentist who, for example, reveals that certain work is unnecessary, even when you would never have known that on your own? A principled person stands apart in his ability to captivate unwavering loyalty.

In Robert Cialdini's classic book *Influence* (1998), he tells of a top waiter who unscrupulously used this function of human behavior to boost orders and consequently tips for larger groups of diners. Taking the initial order, the waiter would hesitate, look over his shoulder, whisper that the dish "wasn't as good tonight as it usually is," and suggest two other menu items that were slightly *less* expensive. Diners felt grateful that the waiter had done them a favor—and now perceived him as someone they could trust. The waiter received higher tips, as diners were inclined to order more expensive wines and desserts from this waiter of such seeming high integrity.

Strategy 3: Little by Little

In a study done by Freedman and Fraser (1966), a team of psychologists called several housewives in California and asked them if they had a few minutes to answer a few questions about the household products they used. A majority agreed.

Then the researchers called again three days later but this time asked if they could send five or six men to the home to go through all of the kitchen's cupboards, pantries, and shelves as part of a *two-hour* tally of household products. The psychologists discovered that these housewives were more than *twice as likely* to agree to the *two-hour* request than a group of housewives who were asked *only* to complete the larger task. You see, if their unconscious was not first primed, the housewives had no foundation to submit to such an inconvenience. How does this work?

When we take that initial small step in one direction, we are motivated to maintain a sense of consistency to greater requests and

additional investment along those same lines. The implication for imbuing others with loyalty is far-reaching.

Let's say, for example, that you want a customer to be more loyal to your organization. Invite him to the company picnic, have him speak with and get to know your employees, and ask him for references and referrals and suggestions on how you can improve your business relationship.

These small steps build internal momentum. Clearly, he *must* care about your company because he has invested himself in it. To leave you, he would need to justify to himself why he put so much time and energy into improving the relationship. This necessity forces him subconsciously to come up with reasons for staying with you, even when more favorable conditions might be found elsewhere. This is why successful salespeople—selling carpet to cars to timeshares—want to keep potential customers in their clutches for as long as possible. The more time you spend with them, the harder it is for you to justify walking away.

When people have no emotional, financial, or material investment in an enterprise, they're quicker to jump ship. Get someone involved as part of a team or a cause, little by little when things are going well, and you will find that they will stand by you in more difficult times down the road. The bottom line is this: *The more of himself he invests in you, the more he will care about you.*

This holds true for our more personal relationships as well. When a person gives, he loves the object of his giving more—and so love is planted and grows. A child receives and a parent gives; who loves more? The child cannot wait to get out of the house, while the parent is forever concerned with the child's well-being.

In fact, every positive emotion stems from giving and flows outward from us to others, whereas every negative emotion revolves around taking. For example, lust is the *opposite* of love. When we lust after someone or something, our interest is purely selfish in our desire to feel complete. When we love, however, our focus is on how we can express our love and give to the other person. It makes us feel good to give, and we do so happily. When someone we love is in pain, we feel pain. When someone after whom we lust is in pain, however, we think only about how this person's situation will affect us, in terms of our own inconvenience or discomfort.

Little Touches Make a Big Difference

Your employees also have homes and families that are of paramount importance to them. Do not refuse them the opportunity to make personal phone calls during working hours or other basic conveniences. Be flexible when employees ask for family time off. Consider long-term and short-term rewards for your employees. The former might be profit sharing; the latter might be offering things that can make your employees' lives easier, such as a ride home when they work late, dry-cleaning services, catering services, or movie tickets and a restaurant coupon for the entire family to make up for time taken away from them when an employee must work late.

Strategy 4: Loyalty Is Earned, Not Owed

If you want your employees to be loyal to *you*, you must be loyal to *them*. Sometimes this means supporting them when they need help to deal with customers, suppliers, or coworkers who are treating them unfairly. And sometimes it simply means being patient and understanding when they make an honest (or even not-so-honest) mistake.

Your decision to do so engages the law of reciprocity, whereby the other person feels that he owes you one. Whenever someone does us a favor, it can make us uncomfortable because it makes us feel dependent, and human beings need a sense of independence. Therefore, when we do something for someone else—that is, showing our loyalty—that person reflexively feels obligated to pay us back to make himself more emotionally solvent.

Consider an instance where a district sales manager wants to prevent a big client from considering other vendors' goods or services. Should a mistake arise on her customer's invoice, and she goes to bat for him, she will create her own insurance policy. For example, she might say, "*Mr. White, I know that the contract says 4,000 gallons of*

oil, and if you were told that you could get it at \$45 a gallon, then that's good enough for me." She then copies him on any letters that she may send on his behalf or keep him apprised of pertinent conversations or e-mails.

This single gesture will have earned her an amazing amount of credit the next time she needs him to support something important to her. If you are in a position to come to the rescue when someone else's back is against the wall, you will have earned their loyalty and gained their respect. Equally compelling, studies show that a person who had resolved to his satisfaction a serious issue *is more loyal to the company than one who never had any complaints in the first place*. This is true for dual psychological factors—the *law of reciprocation* and *emotional investment*.

Keep in Mind

Research estimates that it costs five times more to gain a new customer than to keep an old one. To put it another way, if 10 percent of customers who try your product or service can be turned into lifetime loyal customers, then this can save you, on average, up to 80 percent of what it would cost, from a marketing standpoint, to gain new customers. That means, whatever the customer wants, as long as it's within the realm of reason, give it to him.

Strategy 5: The Attitude of Gratitude

Imagine a parent giving each of his two children a brand new bicycle. One child is effusive in his appreciation. The other barely mumbles a thank-you, only to ask for a basket and bell 10 minutes later. Which child do you think the parent will be more eager to give to next time?

One of the prevailing yet subtle forces behind loyalty is *gratitude*. Anytime you have the opportunity to express your appreciation to another person—whether a thank-you note for some good advice,

a brief e-mail, or small gift—you put yourself into a category all by yourself. Most of us complain about one thing or the other, and as soon as we get what we want, we move on and don't look back . . . until the next time we need something. Instead, take the time to express your gratitude, and in these egocentric times, you will stand out as a person of extraordinary character.

It makes us feel good to give—but not to feed a bottomless pit. Yes, showing appreciation for another person's efforts is the right thing to do, but you will also find that others are always more willing and even eager to help you out, again and again—because you made them feel good about themselves, and you have shown yourself to be worthy of their effort and support.

See also:

- Chapter 8: *Get Back Any Customer You've Lost, No Matter Why They Left*
- Chapter 18: *Master the Art of Charisma with the Complete Psychological Formula for Instant Likability.*

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