

How loyal should I be to my employer?

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

You should be exactly as loyal as you see people being rewarded for loyalty. There are three kinds of companies: those that value it and compensate with loyalty and security; those that feel employees are as expendable as nose tissues and blow them off, no matter how loyal and hard working; and those that ask for the employees' loyalty but don't keep their end of the contract, essentially flushing them.

Ten years ago, my advice would have been that loyalty pays. Companies then placed a value on loyalty. They worked people hard, but they rewarded loyalty. Now we're in a cycle that's 180 degrees different. Companies see employees as short term plugs in a socket, and new upgrades will replace them in several years. They aren't valuing the long-term, valuable employee. The employee isn't loyal in return. Pity. Ten years from now, someone will have the new idea of finding ways to achieve loyalty, and it will happen when that behavior gets rewarded. Pretty simple.

Employees feel uncomfortable attaching themselves to the organization with removable tape instead of Velcro. Most of us like belonging, being part of something we like and respect, and behaving in loyal Boy Scout ways. We like throwing ourselves into it, giving our all, waving flags and putting hand over heart as the company band marches by. We like being loyal and feel almost like it's cheating when we aren't. The tune bitterly changes, however, when we find ourselves and our loyalty unceremoniously dumped in this week's downsizing.

Bosses hate it when I talk about loyalty in my television appearances. They tell me they face a buzz saw of angry employees who have also seen the TV segment and realize they aren't getting the rewards of loyalty.

Here's the contract that employer and employee must have: You be effective and loyal and give your all, maybe even passing up opportunities, and the boss rewards it with money, benefits, security. If the contract is one-sided, i.e., you're doing all the giving, then you're also a fool if you're loyal. Looking at this a little closer, the ticket that needs to get punched for your loyalty is the boss' fair treatment and provision of security. Otherwise, do your job, but don't give your heart away.

The employer is paying for your performance. Do your best. But if giving up other parts of your life doesn't net you anything, then don't go in that loyalty sphere. Just do your good job and look for a company where loyalty matters.