

How Unforgettable Leaders Inspire Loyalty

✘ By Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D

Think loyalty is dead? Think again.

Loyalty may not look like it did 20 years ago – when companies offered career-long employment and workers unquestioningly followed orders – but loyalty is far from deceased. Loyalty is an intrinsic human characteristic based on emotional attachment that can be tapped, nurtured and developed. Inspiring loyalty takes leaders with insight into the human heart and sensitivity toward the hopes and aspirations of others. If you've ever worked with such a leader, I know it's an experience you will never forget.

In my seminars on the Power of Collaborative Leadership, I share examples from executives I've interviewed about their most memorable and inspiring bosses. Here are seven ways unforgettable leaders inspire loyalty:

1) They encourage you to continuously improve

We knew she wanted us to succeed. She was always acknowledging our good work and at the same time, pushing us to improve. She had an almost *magical* ability to urge us to excel in ways that never trivialized our current achievements.

2) They trust you

I always felt that my boss absolutely trusted me when he gave me assignments. Essentially, he sized up who he had on his team, and then decided who was best to get the job done. When he picked assignments for me, he also took responsibility for having chosen me. He gave me absolute freedom to succeed or fail, but I always felt supported by this man. With the assurance of both his trust and his commitment, I felt that whether I won or lost, he was with me. I gave that job everything I had.

3) They know you – they really know you

I was at a claim office of about 125 employees, walking through the office with the claim manager. This particular manager had received fantastic feedback on our Quality Leadership Measurement System survey, so I was curious to

watch her with her people to figure out what generated not only the good financial results, but also this great feedback. And as we walked through the room, conversing about the normal work conditions, she would often stop and refer to specific individuals: "Steve over there has been in our area for 15 years. Steve also coaches Little League. He's got a winning record this year." We'd then move on to someone else, and as we left that person's area, quietly the claim manager would say, "Sally had some problems with her daughter this year. She's a teenager, you know. And these are tough years. We've had many sessions behind closed doors where she's trying to sort through these problems."

It became apparent to me that this woman knew all of her people. And I don't mean just knew their jobs. She knew each individual – what their concerns were, what got them excited. She knew when they were upbeat because things were going well, and she knew when they were struggling and needed her time and attention. When I asked, "How on earth can you do this for 125 people?" she replied: "That's my job."

4) They include you

My boss, the CEO, was brilliant – a genius who thought way outside the box. Although I suspect he had the answers all the time, he spent hours talking with us, involving us and making us feel as if we were an integral part of a huge transformation– as if we were making history. And he got so much out of all of us. Working with him was exciting, exhausting, time consuming, incredibly intense, and absolutely thrilling.

5) They share your values

We shared exactly the same values and high aspirations about wanting to make the company a truly great place for people to work for the long term – and we agreed about what it was going to take to achieve that goal. How many vice presidents of Human Resources could be so lucky as to have this kind of alignment of values with their boss? Not many!

6) They join your team

The leaders I recall as the most inspirational were also the ones who were "in the boat" with me. They didn't stay above the job or the project or the exercise or the problem. Instead, they became part of the team, so that we felt we were all working together to find collaborative solutions to

our challenges.

7) They motivate you

The best leader I ever worked for combined a deep understanding of organizational dynamics with an exceptional talent for dealing with people. At meetings he would pose questions that left us curious, energized, engaged, and highly motivated. We couldn't do enough for him. Sometimes I wondered if we were all hypnotized. I've never seen people work so hard for someone and still want to do more.

Building loyalty has as many different faces as the people you lead. It's about the daily encouragement and support that only happens when you understand and embrace employees at the human level. It's about including and connecting in ways that makes people want to go "above and beyond" because of that personal connection, affection, and respect. One executive summed up his experience: *"People will be almost embarrassingly loyal to a leader who is loyal to them."*

About the Author: Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D. (www.CarolKinseyGoman.com) is a leadership presence coach, international keynote speaker, and the author of "The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help – or Hurt – How You Lead."