

Redefining Loyalty

By

Marlys Harper, March 9, 2025

The word loyalty is undergoing a major transformation. Once considered a virtue, loyalty was characterized by allegiance and faithfulness to one's family, friends, country, and values. Its definition and manifestations are shifting from steadfastness and dependability to transient opportunism. Loyalty is becoming a commodity.

Loyalty has become transactional, a commodity to be bought and bartered for personal gain and power. Elon Musk's \$277 million investment to support Trump's campaign has already yielded rich dividends in power. Musk exhibits his unbridled power shamelessly, without a modicum of decorum. Gleefully waving a chainsaw, he hacks indiscriminately, severing government workers from their careers and healthcare on the mere perception they may not be loyal enough to Trump's agenda. Although we did not elect him, his unrestrained tentacles have dipped deep into government agencies' payment systems and confidential documents without our permission.

The duration of Musk's loyalty to the president will most likely be determined by the sustainability of his power and the benefits he pockets. If the superegos have a falling out, Musk could say, "You know my campaign contribution? It was a loan." That would echo what Trump told Zelensky last week as he withdrew our country's loyalty to Ukraine. According to Trump, our past support became a loan to be repaid with Ukraine's natural resources. Following the appalling Trump-Vance berating of Zelensky in the Oval Office, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a former staunch supporter of Ukraine, switched his loyalty and defended the shocking behavior of the president and vice president.

Rewards have become the currency of loyalty. Knowing the election would be tight and he may need a few more votes, Trump made a deal with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to drop his campaign and endorse Trump. The carrot would be a cabinet position, Secretary of Health and Human Services, in which Trump would "let him go wild." Caroline Kennedy overrode family loyalty in favor of loyalty to the citizens of the United States. She wrote a scathing personal letter to the senators, urging them not to confirm her cousin. Despite her pleas, Senate party loyalists confirmed him. RFK is already lying about the measles outbreak that started in Texas and has now spread to at least seven other states. He says this happens every year, downplaying the cause, vaccination avoidance, and that hospitalizations are for quarantine purposes. Both statements are false: this outbreak is spreading quickly because of unvaccinated children, and quarantine occurs at home, not in hospitals.

Besides the sweeping pardons of all criminals involved in the January 6th attack on the Capitol, the Justice Department made a deal with New York City Mayor Eric Adams to drop the charges against him in exchange for his commitment to advance Trump's immigration agenda in the city. Multiple federal prosecutors resigned, refusing to participate in the corrupt quid pro quo scheme.

Threats are utilized as coercion to exact loyalty. Those who showed courage when faced with Trump's threats are too numerous to mention here. However, some outstanding examples are John McCain,

Mitt Romney, Liz Cheney, and Adam Kinzinger, whose integrity prevailed over party loyalty. They chose the greater good, knowing their choice would result in political peril. Recently, Lisa Murkowski, Susan Collins, and Mitch McConnell admirably voted their consciences on some of the cabinet confirmations. Our elected representatives in Congress must not cave to reflexive loyalty. The country is waiting, hoping for push-back. If members of Congress fail to think critically, consult their consciences, and make independent decisions, they may find themselves on the wrong side of history.

The word loyalty, historically a virtue, has been debased to a remunerative commodity. It is shedding the last vestiges of virtuous connotations to don those of opportunism and transient whims, sweetened by the promise of power and personal gain.

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