



A few weeks ago, I was hiking on a trail in the Rocky Mountain National Park where I've been hiking since I learned to walk. It is common, as I pass people going in the opposite direction, to pause and share short conversations. I do it both as a friendly gesture and as a break to catch my breath and allow my body to rest a few moments. On my recent hike, a man noticed my baseball cap with KC on it and commented, "It must really be hard to be a Royals fan." My response was to share how much I enjoy listening to and attending games. He asked, "How can you support a team that is so pathetic and has not won a world series since 1985?" I noticed a bit of defensiveness rising inside me, but did not react. I simply responded, "They are my team and I am proud to be a fan." We parted and likely will never see each other again.

In reflecting on that experience I realize loyalty, for me, is not attached to winning. Someone once told me if their football team is not playing for a national championship they are not interested any more. For that person, being a fan is connected with a certain outcome. They are cheerleaders for the team. That is fine for them. It is not OK for me. I want to be a champion for my team and support them through good times and difficult times. Some will say I have been conditioned by living in a city that has not had Super Bowl champs or World Series teams for several decades. I suggest there is something else operating.

Loyalty is about being there for a team, a city, a country, a family, or another person no matter what happens. As my father used to say, "Do or die for dear old Rutgers." We had no connection to the school in New Jersey, but he made the point.

Being a champion for others means to support, encourage, coach, and in every way show loyalty to a group of people. I am glad my parents were champions for me and not totally attached to their desired outcomes for me. I let them down and they continued to love me. I celebrate that love, even as they always made clear their desires and opinions.

In operating a business it is also important to make a distinction between being a champion and being a cheerleader with our customers. Everyone performs best when they feel a sense of loyalty rather than judgment. Customers are not always right, but they are always the customers. Loyalty is about appreciating and supporting others to become the best they can be. Being a champion for others can make a huge impact on that person's performance and sense of self worth.

In working with clients I choose to be their champion. I believe in them, sometimes more than they believe in themselves. Over the past six years I have partnered with men in prison who have chosen to change their thinking and behavior and return to the free world to add value rather than continue to be a problem. I share my best with them. I appreciate them and assist as they discover the best in their pasts and build new ways of dealing with the present and future. Some will fail to live up to expectations, but I am convinced no love is ever wasted. As their champion I am willing to share my best thinking and my best suggestions and even my thoughts about their futures.

In working with an office team, you can be champions for those you supervise. That does not mean you settle for less than excellence, but it does convey you are loyal and you believe



# SERVICE SAVVY

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team members can perform at a higher level when necessary. To champion them is to create a connection of trust and loyalty that enables growth to occur. Being loyal to staff empowers great things for the whole team.

In working with clients and patients, I know we will sometimes be disappointed in the outcomes. I am certain my dentists, especially when I was a child, did not always celebrate my self-care. But the dentists I appreciated were those who were loyal to me and believed in me. They supported me to keep on track and to take care of myself.

I really appreciate the friends I have who have made the decision to be my champion. They have remained loyal during some difficult times. I know I have disappointed them a time or two. But I also know they will remain there for me whatever happens. They champion me and I am a better person and a better friend because of it.

The difference between being a champion and being a cheerleader makes sense to me both in the world of sports and in life in general. I will keep supporting the Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals. I can't wait until they play in the Super Bowl and World Series. I cheer their victories and love to celebrate with family and friends. I am a great cheerleader. And I will remain their champion even when they do not reach the top every year.

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