

Superman
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Veracorp LLC

If you grew up in the 1950's you probably remember these words, "Look, up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, no it's...SUPERMAN!" I loved Superman when I was a little kid and wanted to be him. I remember attaching a towel to the back of my Tee shirt and running around the house emulating my hero. I would jump off my bed and the kitchen counter to chase down and capture the bad guys. What a great time I had. When Christopher Reeves (the actor who played Superman in the 1970's) was thrown from his horse, in a split second he was forever transformed from a strikingly handsome, strong, rich hero into a diminutive quadriplegic. It was a devastating tragedy that left the world shuddering. Fortunately, it became an unintended forum for his wife Dana to show the world what loyalty is all about.

It was obvious that Christopher's and Dana's physical attractiveness initially was a germane component behind their relationship. If their relationship remained tethered strictly to their physical attributes it would have disintegrated after Christopher's beauty and money were gone. However, they must have developed other elements beyond the physical because Dana never wavered in her support of Christopher after his accident; she remained loyal to him until the end. Her loyalty was ultimately predicated on her intimate respect for him as a husband, a father and a man, not on his physical demeanor. Beauty and money are transient, moral fiber is enduring.

Recently a business owner held a three month contest for her seven-person sales team in which the winning salesperson would receive a handsome bonus. After the first month she realized that not one of them seemed interested in winning, as evidenced by the poor sales figures. I asked her why she held the contest and she said she wanted the company's sales to be 10% higher. I asked her why she thought the contest failed and she said she didn't know. When I asked her what her employees wanted she initially thought it was money but now she wasn't sure. I suggested that perhaps her sales force, originally motivated by money, needed something more genuine than financial incentives to inspire them to work harder to reach her sales goals. If she could find out what they wanted perhaps they would favorably respond to her request. By the next month she found out that three of her employees wanted to work from home, two wanted to have more flex time,

one wanted more autonomy and the last was satisfied with everything as it currently existed. Based on her new-found knowledge she was in the process of developing individualized plans for each employee that would give them what they wanted in return for what she wanted, a 10% increase in sales for the next two quarters. The outcome of her program is still uncertain but I predict that the sales force will achieve her goal of increasing sales by 10% because they will concomitantly be working on their own goals which will awaken their passion and ultimately build their intrinsic loyalty toward her. The money is transient, personal goals are enduring.

Many business owners are unaware of the transient nature of money and how it alone cannot create loyal employees. Because they mistakenly believe that monetary incentives engender loyalty they reward their employees with raises, bonuses, gifts, trips, prizes and an assortment of munificence that appease their employees' original desire for more money. Unwittingly they reinforce the concept that money creates loyalty and feel quite betrayed when their "loyal" employees walk out the door to a competitor offering them more; loyalty that is bought is only as deep as the owner's pockets. Conversely, enduring loyalty can be created when employees develop a visceral respect for the owner, as Dana did for Christopher. Allowing employees to develop their own goals will imbue respect for the owner and they will become as passionate and loyal to the owner as Dana was to Christopher, even when he stopped being Superman.