

Are You Loyal

by Joseph N. Bell
Photos by Mickey Pallas

The other day I called on a half-dozen salaried executives. They work for different companies—yet the pattern of their conversation was frighteningly similar.

All six disposed of the business on which I had come as quickly as possible; then each man launched into a lengthy complaint against his place of business, his employer, and even the products whose sales paid his salary.

I knew none of these men intimately, yet they couldn't wait to fill me in on the alleged stupidities of their superiors.

These were not stock-room boys or newly employed clerks speaking, mind you; they were managers with top-level responsibilities. Yet, so vitriolic were their outbursts that a listener couldn't help wondering: why do they stay in their jobs?

The comments of one bright executive—a family man in his middle thirties, personable, intelligent, talented—was fairly typical. "Our product is going to pot," he said, "because they've closed their minds to ideas upstairs. Our competitors are improving and progressing. We're going backward. They won't listen to me here, so I don't even bother to offer suggestions any more."

Yet this man was out selling his company's product in a highly competitive field!

The great American habit of griping threatens to reach unmanageable proportions—and there's a very fine line between griping and disloyalty. Griping sometimes can be a way to let off excess steam, but disloyalty is dishonesty!

Griping probably never was developed to such an extent as during World War II, when American servicemen made it their favorite pastime. But this had no effect on their loyalty to the United States; when they fought, they fought very well, indeed.

But the griping habit, carried over into business life after the war, has too often created a sour attitude toward employers. This, in turn, has rendered many a good worker virtually useless.

LOYALTY to an employer has earned some workers the contemptuous label of "company man"

—which is supposed to set an individual off as a kind of management spy. Thus loyalty often is mistakenly associated with such traits as spinelessness and toadying.

I have a good friend who is an accomplished storyteller. Over the past few years, he feels his ideas have not been given proper consideration at

**Criticizing
one's company and
its products
is an occupational disease
that's highly contagious;
are you a victim?**

Griping is a common type of disloyalty.



Fearing down your boss won't build up your ability or usefulness, and it can cause subtle damage to your effectiveness.

his company, and he has grown ever more bitter about the situation. He vents his spleen by telling wonderfully funny stories about his company and his product at social gatherings, where he is frequently a center of attention.

On the surface, these stories sound whimsical. But basically, what they do is hold both the company and the product up to ridicule so biting that it makes a tremendous impression on the listener. It's inevitable that these stories are repeated by the people who hear them, and the company and the product both suffer as a result.

Perhaps the owners of this company are shortsighted and bigoted. Perhaps conditions are every bit as bad as he portrays them. This really has no bearing on the situation. The man is wasting his talents and his employer's time; he should get out!

This is not to say that conformity is desirable. Far from it. Honest differences in viewpoint are healthy and should be aired; such is the stuff on which progressive companies are built. Nor is it to say that there won't be personality clashes within an organization. Aggressive, determined, resourceful, principled people will not always see eye-to-eye;

to Your Boss?



they'll have arguments that may lead to temporary ill-feeling. But these things blow over in the bigger and more pressing problem of getting the job done.

It's when these personal differences—bitterness toward the company or resentment at seeming injustice—monopolize thought and become more important than doing the job that danger looms.

How loyal are you to your employer? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you ever knock the product or service with which you are associated? (This doesn't mean that you should claim royalties for your product that don't exist or stop trying to improve it. Nor does it mean you should unjustly knock your competitor's product.)

2. Do you make a regular practice of criticizing your company or associates at casual social gatherings?

3. Do you resent the fellow at the office who keeps his mouth shut and does his job, who refuses to be drawn into backbiting sessions?

4. Do you spend a lot of on-the-job time doing personal things because you feel your efforts aren't appreciated anyway?

5. Do you look forward to employee bull sessions

where you can denounce the boss or the system?

If you must answer "yes" to any of these questions, you're probably working far below your potential—and you're due for a good, hard piece of self-examination.

In the midst of this spreading contempt for loyalty to employers is an interesting and significant figure: people are not changing jobs nearly as frequently as they used to. The "quit rate" in business today is only 1.6 percent, an incredibly low figure for a period of prosperity when job-changing normally increases. (During the depression, the rate was 1 percent; during the war, it was 6 percent, which fell off to 3 percent in the early '50s).

The principal reasons, according to Ewan Clague, U.S. Commissioner of Labor Statistics, are loss of seniority rights; nontransferable pension and welfare benefits; the growing proportion of older workers; and the increasing, often pathetic, security-mindedness of Americans of all ages. Also, employers have somehow lost the fine art of firing people—thus compounding the problem themselves!

All these things tend to keep a man on his present job, even though he may hate it. Thus, in one of our greatest eras of prosperity, we are breeding thousands of malcontents too fearful or too con-

servative or too security-minded to make a move.

To the chronic malcontent, of course, changing jobs won't solve anything. He'll be as unhappy and ill-adjusted in his new job as in the old. His only salvation is a complete change of attitude. But the man who is honestly seeking a place where he can make maximum use of his talents and abilities should move on.

One of the happiest men I know is a 40-year-old who two years ago walked out on an executive job in a company where he had been employed for 35 years. He had been asked to do something that violated his principles. When he refused to do it, the pressure was on him to resign or be fired. He simply quit.

He could have stayed on another three years and collected his pension—only to find that while nursing a wound he knew would never heal as long as he was with this company. But he had no taste for wasting three years of his life or his employer's money. He quickly found another job where his abilities are being used to maximum advantage, and he's wonderfully happy.

Chronic dissatisfaction eventually and inevitably turns into disloyalty. It helps no one—least of all the person who expresses it.



If you want to bore someone, especially a business caller, tell him what a lousy job you have.

Stories about the boss seem funny in the telling, but they can cause ridicule of your firm.