

“Independence” is Only an Interim Destination

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We joyously celebrate “Independence Day” in the United States. Separating from England in 1776 was clearly a big deal. It changed the world! And independence remains highly valued in our society today!

Teenagers want independence from their parents. Entrepreneurs seek independence from bosses and drudgery in their work. Dissatisfied wives and husbands pursue independence through divorce.

One of the unexpected potential downside effects of these examples is loneliness. Does that surprise you? The glamor of independence calls to us, only to shatter our hopes with reality. Why is that?

I suggest it's not the false promises of independence as much as it is that our society doesn't prepare us to understand and appreciate the beauty and value of *interdependence*. Nor does our society do much to look beyond independence to the gratifying benefits of serving others as well as serving self.

Seeing the practicality and power of interdependence is a paradigm shift I offer to my clients. Their ability to engage more fully with their teams is significantly enhanced when they are willing to back away from a deceptive declaration of independence and recognize that none of us can “do it all” alone.

As children, we were very dependent. Without the nurturing and care of some protective adult, we would surely die. We had little to give then. Though we could not articulate our needs, we had them!

With passing years and the support of many individuals, we became increasingly able to care for ourselves physically, emotionally, and mentally. A major milestone was being able to provide for ourselves financially. It was so very satisfying to say, “I can finally take care of myself!”

We don't like the constraint of dependence on others, so we react, pushing away, looking for something more liberating. Some individuals may become superb independent producers, but they'll have trouble becoming a good leader or even a beneficial team player if they continue to function autonomously.

That's because the world in which we live is an interdependent reality. Each of us needs other people, especially to live an engaged, fulfilling life.

Teenagers separate from their parents, but they quickly attach to others their own age. Entrepreneurs give up a single boss for multiple and even more demanding customers, and their businesses will remain small if they attempt to produce and sell their products and services alone.

Rarely does divorce provide the freedom that was expected when the marriage was rocky. Statistics show that most divorced individuals enter a new relationship with someone similar to their former mate.

Curiously, interdependent collaboration is far more satisfying for those who seek it. Yet an individual can function interdependently only after a robust period of independence. For example, our daughter needed some years on her own, learning her strengths and preferences (as well as her limitations), before we could have a healthy adult-to-adult relationship. Gratefully, that mutual bond now exists!

Model interdependence for those you influence. Defer to the greater experience of team members when their competence is evident. Encourage their continuing growth. Interdependence within a collaborative culture is far more satisfying and productive for all involved than mere independence!

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