

## **Are People Able to Count on You?**

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Your parents were your first and maybe most significant leaders. They influenced you with every word they spoke and action they took. You were watching, mimicking, and adopting their values!

Were your family relationships strong? Or was yours a dysfunctional or broken home? Either way, what you experienced growing up can be applied in your workplace today.

How important is it to be able to trust others in your organization to handle the responsibilities they've accepted? Leadership authority John Maxwell writes in *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork* that "teammates must be able to count on each other when it counts." He goes on to say that "the greatest compliment you can receive is being counted on."

So, pause and be a little critical of yourself for a moment. If I gathered all those who work closely with you and asked them to rate you on how reliable you are--how consistently you "come through" when you commit to something--how would they rate you? Remember, broken informal promises count just as much as official job duties that are overlooked or forgotten!

As I was preparing my thoughts for this article, I read an essay by Randy Hicks, President of the Georgia Family Council. Hicks referenced *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* by researcher Elizabeth Marquardt, a child of divorce herself.

Hicks wrote, "Elizabeth observed that children of divorce must travel alone between each of their parent's worlds and make sense of their sometimes dramatically different sets of values, beliefs, and ways of living."

"No matter how amicable divorced parents might be and how much they each love and care for the child, their willingness to do these things does absolutely nothing to diminish the radical restructuring of the child's universe."

My friend, Jack, had experienced just such an amicable divorce. Until his daughter graduated from high school and moved to Savannah, she alternated weeks living with Jack and with her mother.

Jack was there for every special event in his daughter's life. Her mother, stepfather, stepmother, and Jack all loved her deeply, and she knew it. Often, she would have four parents show up at school events to support her!

I encouraged Jack to send the article to his daughter, asking for an honest recollection of her youth. Despite her mother and Jack making the best of a difficult situation, Jack's daughter sometimes felt alone. She lamented, "I belonged everywhere, without belonging anywhere specific."

Jack had wanted to "be there" for his daughter. He learned, however, that from her viewpoint, half the time he had NOT been there at all. Her reality was different from what he would have preferred.

Sure, she knew she could call on her Dad for anything. But she also knew she'd have to call rather than glance across the room. Jack realized from her response to the article that his "count-on-ability" rating was, in reality, about half of what he had imagined!

Recall your youth. If your parents were present, you likely never gave it a thought; you just assumed they'd always be there. Your parents were count-on-able, at least in terms of availability.

If you were a child of divorce, however, or another situation prevented a parent from being present, you were aware of the absence. Though not literally abandoned, you sometimes wondered where you fit and just how important you were to those supposedly filling their parental responsibility.

As a leader or teammate, your "count-on-ability" rating is evaluated daily by those who are affected by your presence and service. Leaders who think otherwise are deceiving themselves!

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