

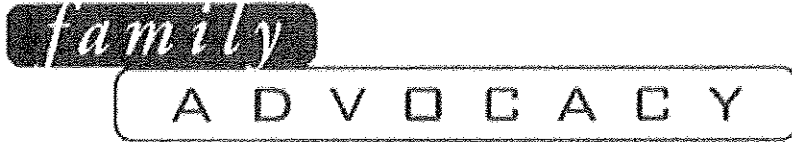
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Kendrick comments on the loneliness of arguing a position that is not supported by everyone.

The Inevitable Loneliness of Personal Advocacy

Kendrick, Michael J. *The Inevitable Loneliness Of Personal Advocacy*, Planet Advocacy, Issue Number 18, December 2006, London, England.

It is often the case that taking a personal stand serves to isolate the advocate, irrespective of the merit of the arguments they are making at the time. This may only be to a degree, but is usually quite tangible. If a potential advocate is unprepared for this kind of experience, it will add to their distress. Whereas, if the advocate can reconcile themselves to these effects as being a "natural" part of advocacy, then the process can be much more bearable. Often, it can also add to the advocate's sense of purpose, conviction and resolve to know that what they are encountering is intrinsic to "getting off the fence" and deciding what is important to uphold.

Advocacy is, by definition, a role in which one makes a "partisan" claim. It is essentially "partisan", because one is making a case towards a decided position. Were one to take no position at all on an issue, then one would have no allegiance and could thereby claim either neutrality or indifference. It is the partisan or decidedness of advocacy that ultimately serves to leave advocates isolated from many others, simply because these persons cannot or will not follow the advocates lead, thereby rendering the advocate to be more alone than not in the support they experience for their act of taking a position on an issue.

It is helpful to recognize that many people may simply not know what they think about a given subject, irrespective of the passion of those around them for a given view. In such instances where an ill considered or premature commitment to a given stance under pressure may be unwise, it is the prudent thing to defer on the issue. This is not a lack of support *per se*, though many passionate advocates may find it hard to accept that others are not as resolved as they are.

It is also true that some unresolved people may feign a kind of lukewarm support in the hope that this will appease the (committed) advocate, but this action may actually serve to deepen the advocate's doubts about the authenticity of the support offered, given its tepid and unconvincing nature. Further, it is often hard for many people to explicitly and concisely express their reservations on a given issue, particularly at a time when they are being intensely pressed to "get off the fence" and declare themselves. Nonetheless, until they have resolved these they will most certainly avoid encounters where they must decide one way or the other.

It is also true that taking a stand may frighten many people, simply because they cannot tolerate the possibility that this action may incur the wrath, opposition and possible censure by others. The underlying difficulty may not be the comparative merit of the stand itself, so much as an incapacity in many people to withstand what may come with disagreeing with others. Additionally, it

may also be the case that this advocacy action may result in any number of contingent costs being imposed on the "stand taker" and their allies by the parties that oppose their position. In some instances, these costs may be quite punishing, so the fear of costs of this kind is not unrealistic and may well diminish the ardor, even of people who lean towards the position being taken.

In other instances, the difficulty may be the relative importance of the issue the advocate has highlighted in comparison with other issues that the potential supporter is pursuing. While the advocate is clear that their issue is of paramount importance to them personally, the same cannot be said about others, as their hierarchy of issues and interests may be at a variance with the advocate, such that "going to the wall" on the advocate's issue may potentially imperil progress on other issues. This does not necessarily mean that the person being solicited for support opposes the issue just that they differ on the ultimate importance of the issue.

It may also be the case that there are times when a given advocate is personally prepared to take an issue to a greater extreme than those around them. This may reflect less a difference of view, than it is a difference in how radical potential supporters are willing to be in the degree to which they will commit to an issue. For instance, what might be a life defining commitment for one advocate may be a comparatively casual and much less compelling commitment for another.

For these sorts of reasons, it is important for advocates to initially continue to recognize the limitations in the commitment of others to their cause, but to then go beyond being hurt or discouraged by this lack of support, to understanding the actual sources of ambivalence, uncertainty and irresolution they may encounter in people whenever their support is tested. In many instances, the person who seems quite rejecting and unsupportive may have no choice but to do this, given their own inability at the time to unreservedly support the definitive position that other advocates are taking.

At the same time, if advocates were to defer taking a stand until virtually everyone was on board, this would eliminate the many ways in which advocates can be somewhat ahead of their peers on many issues. It would also yoke progress to the meanderings of the undecided and uncommitted rather than to the willingness of the few to address what the many have yet to engage. Leadership and advocacy are always in tension with the comfortable majority consensus of the day, as advancement must most certainly come with those bold enough to confront issues ahead of their time.

Nonetheless, it is most certainly lonely to be arguing for a position that few around one takes seriously. It is also lonely to experience a kind of rejection at so many turns that one might wonder whether the effort is pointless and futile. These questions are not those of the naïve, but rather the doubts of the realistic and that they can see that their position is fragile in terms of meaningful support. Yet, it has always been so that support is not obtained simply because one is right on

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the issue. Rather, support is generated over time by all means of persuasion, logic and relationship.

The presence of unwillingness in advocates to face the testing, rejection and even attacks of others is most certainly a recipe for a failed advocacy initiative. On the other hand, a willingness to be "lonely" and to sustain oneself in the midst of the questions, doubts and self interest of others will most certainly position the advocate to make the most of whatever support is available. While it matters greatly whether one is right on the issue, it is also true that this may not have any meaningful effect if one is not committed to paying the price of being right. One of those prices most certainly will be times when one has no choice but to alone in one's convictions.

