

# Remember Others' Merits and Forget Their Shortcomings

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In China there is a legend about a man named Ning Qi. He was a citizen of the State of Wei around the beginning of the Spring and Autumn Period (722BC - 481BC). There was nowhere he could make a living with his skills in Wei State, so he decided to approach Duke Huan, the ruler of Qi, a neighboring state. Due to his poverty, he had to masquerade as an ordinary merchant driving an ox cart to get to the State of Qi. In this way he arrived at Qi's state capital and set up camp outside the City Gate of Guo.

One night, Duke Huan of Qi came out of Guo to meet his guests while Ning Qi was feeding his ox. Thereupon Ning Qi quickly patted the ox's horn and started singing sorrowfully, pouring out all of his sorrow that he had nowhere to use his skills to make a living. After Duke Huan of Qi heard his song, he immediately thought Ning Qi was no ordinary person, so he decided to appoint him as a minister. However, all of his other ministers said, "He is from the State of Wei, which is only 500 li [*a unit of distance approximately 0.5 km*] away, so it is not that far away. It is best to send someone to investigate him. If he is really skilled it still will not be too late to appoint him as a minister then."

Duke Huan of Qi said, "It is not true. If he were investigated, I am afraid that people would talk about his small imperfections, and we would overlook his talent and virtue. This is precisely why some kings cannot keep the world's talented people. Furthermore, no one

is perfect. We should consider his merits more." He immediately ordered Guan Zhong, the Prime Minister of Qi, to welcome Ning Qi and appoint him as a minister. Ning Qi did not disappoint anyone and demonstrated his many skills. Guan Zhong thought highly of him and admired him. Later, Ning Qi became the Prime Minister of Qi and his name went down in history. Duke Huan of Qi was able to treat worthy men and scholars with courtesy, and he utilized talented people to help run his state; finally he became the head of the "Five Overlords" of the Spring and Autumn Period.

Duke Huan of Qi's words revealed an important principle. No one is perfect. When we evaluate others, we should place greater emphasis on their merits than on their shortcomings. One of the Prime Ministers of the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Jiuling, who was also a poet, accurately said that people should, "Remember other's merits and forget their shortcomings."