

# INSIGHTS THAT MY CLIENTS HAVE TAUGHT ME

## WHO AM I

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**I** am confused. I am no longer sure who I am. I was a supervisor trainer for a large company and then I got fired. I was the family provider, now I'm out of work. I was a loving husband, now I'm divorced. I no longer have an identity. I need to find myself. The Client

What constitutes a person? Is it the labels that you or others have placed on them or on yourself?

"You're such a pretty girl."

"I am a tense person." "I'm a shy person."

"He is an angry person."

"He is a doctor." "I am an electrician." "I'm a dentist."

"I am a mother." "I am a father."

"He is an alcoholic." "I'm a drug addict."

"You're lazy and irresponsible."

"You are such a happy boy."

"I'm gay." "I'm straight."

"I'm black." "I'm white."

"Girls are not good in math" (therefore, you will never be good in math).

"The world is not safe, and I am not able to deal with all the problems I'm faced with, therefore, life is overwhelming."

Labels, Labels, Labels. Life cannot be overwhelming; it is what you think about yourself and life that makes it feel overwhelming to you.

The labels that you have accepted as true can make you a victim or a victor. The problem is that so many people accept their labels as true

and never challenge them. Labels are used to separate people and as a result they often engender feelings of isolation. However, most people will continue to apply them to themselves and also to put them on others.

I dare you to challenge some or all of your labels.

Are you really a tense person? Are you tense around your mother, brother or sister? Are you a shy person? Are you shy around your family? By making yourself into the label, you become that thing. If you were really a tense or shy person, you would be that way all the time! The truth is that you act tensely in certain situations, while around your mother, you are relaxed. You act shyly in new or strange situations otherwise you would never speak up at any time! Your behaviors are based on what you think and on what you feel.

“Joe feels inadequate. He believes his inadequacy is real. He doesn’t know that it is just a thought. His inadequacy cannot exist unless he thinks it; but because he believes it is real, he bases his behavior on that thought and acts inadequate.” Jane Nelson

What happens to your self-image when, as a dentist, you develop Panic Disorder? You can no longer work on your patient’s teeth because you are afraid that half way through drilling you might have a major panic attack and will not be able to finish the procedure.

As a mother, who are you when, suddenly, your children are grown and move half way around the world. Now what is your identity? What purpose do you serve? As a father, you were the provider, then you got fired or laid-off and your wife had to go to work and you no longer felt like you had an identity.

“I’m an alcoholic but I have not had a drink in seven years! Then I fell off the wagon.” Most people use Labels to define themselves. What does an alcoholic do? He gets drunk. So, if you are an alcoholic, what do you expect from yourself? Change what you think, and you will change how you act.

In the Foreward to the first edition of AA's Big Book it says, "We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body." (emphasis provided) Note: recovered is past tense; not a recovering alcoholic. And, state of mind is not a disease. Then it goes on to say, "To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book." Does the urge to use make you an alcoholic? What do you believe? Are you alcoholic because you drink or do you drink because you are alcoholic?

What is the fear that stops you from challenging your labels and beliefs about yourself?

If it is possible for a straight person to discover that they are gay, isn't it possible for a gay person to discover that they are straight? If an alcoholic can, after 15 years of being an alcoholic, decide to get clean and sober, couldn't it be possible for a person who has been involved in the gay life style for 15 years decide to go straight? Do your sexual fancies and urges make you straight or make you gay?

Is it your urges and fancies that make you who you are? Research indicates that, because they were molested, many men and women have sexual fancies about having sex with a child BUT these people will never be arrested because they will never act out against a child. Does the fantasy make the molester? Does the fantasy make the rapist or murderer? (If this were true, I know a lot of men and women who would be in a lot of trouble.)

What is your need to hang onto your labels about yourself and your world?

In all my life experience, I have never seen a black man or woman. As a matter of fact, I have never seen a white man or woman either! The paper I'm writing on is white. If I hold the paper close to my skin, it is very clear that I am not white. My skin comes closer to brown or tan in color. How can I call myself white when by any measure I am a shade of brown? I have seen hair that is black but your skin looks more often like my skin, a shade of brown.

My challenge is not to change you but to get you to look at your life, your labels. "An unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates

Labels, for some things can be useful. You certainly want to know if that package is rabbit or chicken, but when you try to apply it to people; I have a much harder time justifying it. The exception would be in cases where you want to stereotype, judge, separate, limit, and rationalize your own and/or others behaviors, then the labels (judgments) will serve you well.

Final question: If your are not all the labels that you have attached to yourself, then who are you? I cannot answer for you, but for me, I know that ***I am a dynamic, growing, changing human being who is excited about what I am becoming.***

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