

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



897 What is Your “Work Identity”?

What is your work identity? Did you know you have a “work identity”? You do, and we’ll talk about it, next, on The Extra Point.

I doubt you have ever given any thought to your “work identity.” You show up every day, do what you have to do, and leave. You’re still on the payroll, so you must be doing something right — right?

Let’s start with a definition, what is work identity? Psychologists define it as a collection of meanings attached to the worker, by him/herself and others who work with that person. Further, possessing a positive work identity bolsters self-esteem, engagement, a sense of belonging, and is linked to favorable job and career outcomes.

Sometimes, co-workers give each other nicknames, and that can help develop identity. At about the same time I launched the J.Q. Fanihi Show on KUAM radio some four decades ago, the station hired a young woman for an advertising sales job. She had left a government job and was soon to be a single parent. She was motivated to succeed.

The sales manager recognized that she had both raw talent and drive, and that she talked — a lot. He eventually gave her the nickname “Jaws.”

Was it because she talked so much? Was it because the Spielberg blockbuster movie of the same name was fresh in everyone’s memory, and she came to see herself as a predator of sorts?

I don’t know. I do know the name stuck, became her identity, and she evolved into a superstar in selling.

Do people call you by a certain nickname, and do you call others by a name they’ve been labeled with?

These names can be a powerful influence on how people see themselves and their value to an organization.

To be clear, you don’t need a nickname put on you in order to have a work identity. Some people see themselves as a problem solver, or an organizer, or a peacemaker, and we could go on and on. How do you see yourself?

Let’s view it differently. Think back to the last time somebody asked the question, “So, what do you do?” What did you say? Did you do so with enthusiasm? Did you add the word “just” in your description, such as “I’m *just* a server ...or *just* a front desk clerk at a hotel...or *just* a (you fill in the blank)?

How you answer that question — both in the words you use and the energy you have — might be a good indicator for how you see yourself, and what your work identity is.

A solid work identity can strengthen us, and help us navigate tough times. When people lose a job, often that identity is also lost. As stated, self-esteem, self-worth is often tightly connected to one’s career. The loss of that can lead to depression and despair.

If you’re saying to yourself, “I don’t have a specific identity, think about your role and your strengths. Maybe you can put together a story about your career, which highlights past achievements, present goals, and future aspirations. That could become your identity.

You probably have a larger impact on your employer and coworkers than you realize. If you have the courage to do so, I’ve got a little exercise you can use to help with figuring out your work identity.

(Con’t.)

Take a breath, this will require a little courage. Ask your coworkers to offer a few words for how they see you. If you do, you might be amazed at what they say about you — how they describe you and your talents.

When you figure it out, reach out and let me know what your work identity is.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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