

Are We Who Society Says We Are?

A few weeks ago, I spoke with a friend who had been laid off from her executive job of over 10 years. After a 7-month job search, with no possible foresight of employment, her bills began to pile up. Sadly, she lost her beautiful home, her self-worth and her courage to go on.

I was completely shocked to learn of [let's call her] Debbie's situations. I felt like I had been a horrible friend. She had retreated from a terrible ordeal and I did not know a thing until almost a year later. "Why didn't you tell me?" was my first question to Debbie. A fear of judgment had prevented Debbie from revealing her tribulations, which far too often are seen as failures.

We live in a capitalist society, a nation where its "dream" (the American dream) means acquiring material wealth, rather than patriotism or love for our fellowmen. We are measured by our pockets instead of our morals and branded by our professional affiliations instead of our abilities. We place high emphasis on social hierarchy, and whether we acknowledge that we are slaves to its bigotry, it is unfortunately ingrained in our society.

"What do you do?" is often the qualifying question of social acceptance or rejection. "Where do you work?" is the question contingent upon your response to "What do you do?" In the world of social hierarchy, if someone is impressed by what you do, they would engage you in further conversation. This is normally a sign of social acceptance. However, if "Where do you work?" does not immediately follow "What do you do?" it is more than likely a sign of social rejection.

I see no reason to reveal my career status to inquirers whom I have no business relations with, especially if "What do you do?" is one of the first three questions they ask. In fact, I often eliminate the need for further questions with a response that is weird or lower than their expectations. I have been a communicator for planet Mars, a virtual mermaid, an icicle artist, a wilderness linguist and anything weird enough to get people to quit trying to socially classify me.

Does our career really matter when we are standing in line at the box office to purchase a ticket to see *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof*, hailing a cab, out jogging, at the grocery store, at the mall buying a pair of shoe or on vacation? Should our careers matter if we became unemployed (through no fault of our own), the victim of a repossessed car or foreclosure? I pity the man who thinks his career is superior to humanity. For it is because of humanity he is blessed with a career. A successful businessman needs customers and clients. He is nothing without them.

Perhaps my friend Debbie would not have felt so compelled to keep her ordeal from people who care if society did not define us by "What do you do?" and "Where do you work?"

America had classified Debbie as unemployed, which [even in this wretched economic recession] unfairly translates to unequal, useless, powerless and worthless. Instead, I commend Debbie for her remarkable resilience. One year has passed and she is still standing! She has downsized, found the courage to go on, as well as, temporary employment which enables her to pay her bills.

To me, Debbie epitomizes power and spiritual wealth. Her strength to move on and her faith despite it all is a testimony of spiritual wealth. I am so proud of Debbie for what she has accomplished. It is a mark of distinction beyond any social hierarchy and material wealth, which rightfully requires two questions: “What did you do?” and “How did you do it?”

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