Does your job define you?

Are you your job? When did you last hear yourself saying: “I’m an administrator”, “an electrician”, or “a journalist”? It’s hard wired into our culture to label ourselves and others.

In primary school you were probably asked what you wanted to be when you grew up and most of us have been doing it ever since.

But don’t you have a life as well? Aren’t you a person first, a son or daughter, a friend, and perhaps an athlete, a fisherman, a musician, a painter or whatever it is that you do in your spare time. It’s good to be proud of what you do from 9 to 5. Don’t let that job define how you live.

As soon as you label yourself you start to believe what you say. Even if you’re the best budding lawyer in Sydney or the biggest earning tradesman in Perth you need your own identity outside of work. Remember, your job is what you do, not who you are as a person.

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Here are four reasons not to let your job define you:

1. **Your career may dump you.** It can be very hard if you’re made redundant from a job that you’ve let define you. Or you may give up work to have a family or retire eventually. If you only measure your status on your job you could be in emotional jeopardy when that job is a thing of the past.

2. **You need more than work.** What a yawn if work is the only thing you can talk about. Why not pursue your passions and make yourself more interesting? Put some of your talent, time and energy into outside interests. Everyone has something they’ve always wanted to do. Perhaps it’s quilting or motorcycle racing. Once you follow your passion you’ll have a much better comeback to the awful: “what do you do?” question.
3. **Relationships are more than work.** If you find yourself rating people on how they can help you at work then you need to reframe your thinking. Having a circle of friends outside of work so you can simply be you is really valuable. These friends will support you when times are tough at work.

4. **Anyone can be happy.** Happiness doesn’t just come to people who are successful at work. Just look around the office. Are all of your managers happy? Happiness is about valuing what you have, not something that will come if you get a pay rise or a better title.

**How to find yourself again:**

- **Ask what your job means to you.** It pays you money and hopefully it gives you some interest. But is it really you? Is it what your soul needs?

- **Stop yourself in your tracks.** Your work only defines you if you let it. When asked at a party or other gathering: “what do you do?” try answering “for fun or money?”. Another way to approach the question is to reply with who you are rather than what you do. “I’m a triathlete, a conservationist, and movie buff.”

- **Define your responsibilities not you.** If someone really wants to know what you do for a job, tell them about your responsibilities and transferrable skills. Instead of: “I’m an administrator”, answer: “I manage the administration of new business at my company, which requires XYZ skills”.

- **Cultivate friends outside of work.** What would happen if you lost your job tomorrow? Would you have a network of friends to support you? If not, you need to find new friends or reconnect with old ones.

- **Grow from your passions.** If you take time to develop your interests they can benefit your work. You’ll be happier and most likely more creative at work.

Finally, no matter how great your job is, there is more to you than the job. Choose life above your job.