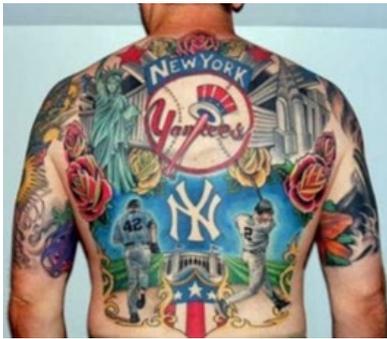


What Defines You?

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Have you ever thought about the basis of your core identity? For example, when you think about who you are, do you first think about your gender, profession, children, hobbies, or possessions? Or do you think about a group of people with whom you want to be associated?

Your core identity is based on the characteristics that most define you. It is a reflection of the attributes you give your highest priority. It could be what you are most passionate about or concerned about. It could be what you feel called to do in

life or what you love doing. It could be related to your family of origin or any other beliefs about yourself.

If you made a list of the top three attributes about yourself to which you give most of your attention, what would they be? Some would include their faith. Professionals immersed in their job might list their work. Some identify most with their knowledge and skill. Some give their appearance, fitness, skin color, or gender their primary focus. Some would include a relationship such as with their spouse, children, or grandchildren. Or it could be a pet, hobby, automobile, alma mater, place, or favorite sports team. Or money, organization, or political affiliation. Or social media persona. Or rather than a source of pride, some people see themselves through their shortcomings such as a fear, health issue, or addiction. Or an adversity that has been overcome.

If you are a parent, you know how important identity is to children. Teenagers join groups including gangs primarily to have an identity. If you are a manager, you know how important belief in and passion for work is to employee engagement. In thinking about friends and neighbors, you know how important houses, cars, and sports can be to some people. People even have their favorite sports teams and brands tattooed on their bodies.

What are you so proud of or identify with that you would tattoo it on your body? What do you put at the center of your life? Reflect on your top three attributes. Consider whether or not your attributes represent that which you truly believe is most important. If they do, good job. If not, or you are unsure, ask yourself these four questions:

Is the core of my identity who I really want to be? Is it

1. Truly the most important aspect of my life when I consider the values I aspire to have?
2. Not dependant on my circumstances and therefore sustainable in terms of how long I can or should rely on it as the primary source of my identity?
3. Healthy for me and/or others whom it influences, particularly those whom I most care about?
4. What I want to be known for, the reputation I want to have, and the legacy I want to leave?

What Defines You?

As we mature, hopefully in a way that makes us better, we change right? We hold on to many core values, but we learn and make adjustments in how we think. We change what we do. In many people, this includes letting go of what previously gave us our identity. We embrace new priorities and values. We may still enjoy our hobbies, possessions, and work, but we subordinate them to values of higher importance which become our new defining characteristics. At some point, we realize that who we are doesn't change due to our circumstances. It is that which is true about us regardless of what other people say or do. It is that which is true regardless of whether we are enjoying prosperity or dealing with adversity. It is that which no one can take away from us or dictate to us.

What you allocate most of your time, money, and energy to is extremely important. It is a reflection of who you are. It reveals your priorities and what defines you. So be intentional about it. Ensure the core of your identity is truly worthy of the investment you make in it. Ensure it is something that reinforces the person you want to be. If the basis of your core identity is in question, give thought to what might reflect a better self. Maybe your worldview, relationships, health, or faith deserve a higher priority than your college alma mater, favorite sports team, social media persona, or work.

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