

Seniors, Are You YOU Or Are You Your Labels?

Do you find it hard to believe? Nearly thirteen years have passed since you first started in kindergarten. Now here you are. Only a short time away from graduation, and going out into a new world.

And if they haven't arrived already, your yearbooks will soon appear. In them you'll find a section of "bests." Best looking, best athlete, best dancer, most likely to succeed, etc. If you find your picture on this page, have you studied enough about labels to consider it nothing but an accolade from your high school peers? Can you resist believing this label shall remain true forever?

Remember this: someone at your next location may be prettier, smarter, faster, etc. Further, when you are in first place, there are many classmates from second place on down. Somehow they've made it. Now it may be your turn to be other than first.

When it comes to this "best" page, we might classify the senior class into three categories: the ones who won, the ones who didn't win and thought they should, and the ones that knew they never had a chance. If you truly desire such an honor, and failed to receive it, then consider this suggestion. Examine yourself and determine what you do have that no one else possesses. Create that category and vote yourself in. To make it official, you could go to your computer and actually generate a certificate for yourself.

As counterproductive as taking too seriously that you are receiving the award, allowing not winning to haunt you can do as much damage. If you must tell anyone (including yourself) about your perceived slight, phrase it thus: "When I was in high school, I believed I should have won." Notice the past tense for believe and the indexing to a specific time. Make history of history.

Now let's examine the other side of the coin---labels we do not like that seem to follow us. Perhaps, as an insecure sophomore you behaved in an immature manner, and your classmates will not let go of that view of you. Or perhaps your dress and hair style appeared bizarre even to your "with it" acquaintances. You had created a persona that even you realized left much to be desired. But you believed you were locked in. You couldn't stand the expected ridicule if you tried to change. The attention this behavior engendered eventually proved unrewarding.

Take heart! Wherever you find yourself three months from now, probably not many of your present classmates will be there with you. Your new associates know very little about you and you can become a new persona and shed the burdensome labels. Start by making a list of labels you believe have been attached to you. Do you resent them or like them? Can you leave them at the door as you leave high school? Start practicing now, and when you meet your new peer group, let them see just what a great person you have become.

Enjoy the Process

Some Farewell Advice for Seniors

Teacher's notes

Well before the end of the senior year, distribute the attached copy of "Are you You" for seniors. Ask the students to take it home and study it. In a day or two, discuss it. What do they think of the advice? In what way can they relate to it? If not for themselves, for someone else? In what ways.

When the question surfaces, "Really, how important is this?" perhaps you can illustrate something from your own experience. Or describe scenarios that happen all too often and that perhaps you have observed. Here are a few to consider.

At a 25th high school reunion, a group of somewhat out of shape former football players gathers at a table. Here they loudly recount every play of the Thanksgiving Day football game in their senior year. They have done this at every reunion since the 5th, and it gets better with each retelling. Something else exciting must have occurred in those 25 years, or they have lived very dull lives.

And at another table, the former Prom Queen holds sway. She is still recognizable since her hair style has not changed, although some twenty pounds have found their way to some unflattering places. Her beautiful youthful complexion has been eroded by the effects of too much alcohol, and the effectiveness of attempts to cover it with makeup diminish as one gets closer. Yet, she still views herself as she appeared a quarter century earlier, and acts accordingly.

What you did, and how you were perceived in high school, good or bad, will have some effect on your ability to get into college, or obtain your first job. Once you have crossed that threshold, what you do, and how you are perceived, wherever you are, will start to influence your future. May it be bright and rewarding.