



# Living Without Labels or Roles

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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When I moved to Medicine Hat, I didn't know anyone, and people didn't know me. I would watch Community Television and read the local newspaper on a regular basis so had a fair idea about the city and some of its citizens.

I remember purchasing one ticket for a concert that was being held at the Cultural Center. I dressed up and went on my own. Before and during the intermission there was opportunity for patrons to bid on silent auction items while enjoying a glass of wine. People were chatting while standing or sitting in groups during these times, so I thought this would be a great time to try a little experiment.

I walked up to one of the groups and pretended that I knew them. With a big smile I asked one man "How was your week?" He began telling me that his mother had been ill, and he had been worried about her. I listened and offered him some assuring words before moving to the next group.

Interestingly, a man who was sitting at a nearby table with his family had been on Community television program a short time before and I complimented him on his singing. I mentioned how I had enjoyed it when he sang an old tune from 1949 called "Slipping Around". He smiled and thanked me before I moved on.

Not one person asked me who I was or indicated that they didn't know me! Everyone just acted as though we were friends (or at least friendly acquaintances).

I can't do that in this city anymore because I have been here for more than twenty years and my private practice as well as this newspaper column have blown my cover!

When I travel, though, I find that I am able to have great conversations with people until they find out that I am a psychologist. As soon as they knew my occupational "label" they immediately slip into a framework of what they expect from me and begin either telling me about family problems or asking for advice.

When I worked as a Child Welfare Investigator, I remember a co-worker stating that when she was asked about her occupation she would reply with "I work for the government" in order to avoid being dragged into certain topics. Another friend who served on the same Board of Directors as me would tell inquirers that he was a farmer even though he was part-time farming and full-time as an Immigration Officer.

Sometimes we lose the ability to just visit with others because we allow labels to box us into a framework and raise the expectations of others.

We are more than the roles and labels that we have. Our core is deeper than just being a parent, or a teacher or a writer. These are parts of ourselves that have functions, but our essence is something that endures over time regardless of the demands of the time or situations we are managing.

Who are you? What labels are stopping you or others from getting to know the person deep inside?

Remember, as you age, roles disappear but the real you remains. Perhaps it is time to drop the labels, get more in touch with who you are and share your essence with the world around.