

## Defining Myself after Weight Loss Surgery

In order to define who you are after weight loss surgery, it's important to answer a few questions. The most important question may be "Who do you *want* to be"? However, before you answer *that* question, let's walk down the road of your past and define who you *have been*. You will discover qualities about yourself that you want to hold on to and develop as you move forward in life. You will also discover some things about yourself that it is time to permanently abandon. Life after bariatric surgery is most assuredly about redefining yourself. You have gone from seeing yourself, and being seen by others as "the fat person" to being "that person who had bariatric surgery and has lost so much weight". It's easy to find yourself wondering who you are at this point, many pounds lighter than you were not so very long ago. You're probably tired of all of the comments and questions related to how much weight you have lost and how you have done it. It's time to start living the new life you have worked so hard for. However, you may be confused about who you are now that you have lost so much weight and the hype of the weight-loss process is over. You may find yourself staring into the mirror wondering, "WHO AM I"?

Let's find out, starting by identifying your "titles" or the "hats that you wear". Imagine you have a wall in your house with a great big board affixed to it. On the board are a number of hooks. On each hook hangs a hat and under each hat is a small sign with a label, one for each of the roles you play. For example, you may have a multicolored, floppy hat to represent the many dimensions and of being a "mom". There may be a fedora or a nursing cap or a chef hat with a label underneath that says "working professional". Is there a whimsical hat with a sign that says "friend"? A hat to represent yourself as a daughter? a woman? a spouse or partner? a dancer? a pianist? a photographer? a volunteer? a mentor? a student?

Make a list of your titles and alongside the list, state the benefits and drawbacks for you in each of these roles. Are there any roles that you want to eliminate? Are you at a place in your life where you no longer want to play some role on your list and that you can responsibly let go of? Maybe your parents forced you to play a musical instrument as a child and you continue to play in a community orchestra even though you don't want to. Would now be a good time to say good-bye to being a "musician"? There are some roles you may have that you wish you didn't but you accept them because you are a responsible person. For example, you might wish you had a sun visor on the wall where your professional hat is because you want to be retired. However, you keep the hat of the working professional because you are a responsible person and have a family to feed. (Idea: Hang the visor underneath the professional hat as a reminder that the retirement hat is one you will be wearing one day!) Is there a role you would like to add to your life? Would you like to become a tap dancer and add a top hat to your wall? Are there some roles you love that you already have but would like to

improve on? Would taking parenting class help you to be an improved version of “mother”?

Now make a list of words that you use to describe yourself and that other people use to describe you. Make this list of words descriptive of your personality. For example, are you “bubbly”, “grumpy”, “responsible”, “gossipy”, “adventurous”, “whiney”, “moody”, “outgoing”, “a good listener”, “lazy”, “serious”, “silly”, “friendly”, “mean”, “motivated”, “introverted”, “lively”, etc.? Be sure to include the names you have been called related to your obesity, such “fat”, “chunky”, and “husky”. Were you called “smart”, “stupid”, “idiot”, “baby doll”, “princess”, “daddy’s girl”, “spoiled”, or “alcoholic”?

Next to each of these descriptive words, write down your feelings related to each of these labels? Which of these things do you want to continue to be? Which do hope to never hear again in reference to yourself?

Okay. You’ve got a really great start toward answering the question, “Who Am I”? You have identified the roles you currently play in life. You have identified words and labels that describe you. You have chosen which ones you like for yourself and which ones you are ready to leave behind. To get rid of the ones you are ready to discard from your life, write the words or labels on separate pieces of paper. Next, light a fire in the fireplace or a large coffee can and drop each piece of paper into the fire, and say out loud, “I am no longer a ‘fatso’”. Then throw the word into the fire and refuse to ever refer to yourself as that again. Do this with each word and label you are getting rid of.

The final steps to figuring out who you are at this time in your life are to verbalize and write down who you *want to be!* Simply state out loud and then write down, “I want to be and will be “a person who thinks positively about myself and others”. “I want to be and will be “a person who plans what I eat every day and sticks to my plan”. I want to be and will be “a person who exercises 60 minutes a day five days a week”. I want to be and will be “a person who focuses on gratitude throughout the day”. That’s the easy part. The more difficult part is to determine *specifically* what you are going to DO in order to *be* each of the things in your list. For example, “I will be a person who thinks positively about myself and others by stopping all judgmental thoughts as soon as I am aware that I am having them and by immediately replacing all negative thoughts with positive ones”. “I will be a person who focuses on gratitude throughout the day by writing down one thing I am grateful for three times each day”.

By specifically defining your goals and visualizing yourself doing them, you will do them and become the person you imagine yourself to be. Picture yourself eating healthy meals. See yourself walking the dogs. Imagine yourself giving genuine compliments to others. Picture yourself looking into the mirror and smiling kindly at yourself.

Decide who you want to be by:

- identifying who you have been
- deciding what parts of your previous self you want to keep and what parts you want to discard
- determining specific things you want to do and specific ways you want to behave.

Choose to become the person you were born to be before the “genuine you” got lost beneath unhealthy extra weight. “Who Am I”? Whoever you choose to be!

Connie Stapleton, Ph.D

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cstapletonphd@knology.net