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I think; therefore, I am......not
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Rene Descartes, a highly influential French philosopher, mathematician, scientist and writer, known as the "Father of Modern Philosophy," coined the phrase, "I think; therefore I am" (borrowing from the Latin: Cogito, ergo sum).

Fast forward to today, and most folks live according to a variation of this phrase, namely, "I think; therefore I am who I think I am."

The question beneath the question is: On what basis am I who I think I am?

Picture a motherboard, or a systemboard — the piece of electronic equipment that runs many electronic and computerized devices. If you've ever seen a motherboard or system board, you'll see it's not flat; rather, there are numerous nodes, diodes, and other small metal and plastic structures soldered to it. These various structures contain all of the programming and commands that allow the computer or electronic device to function.

Now, assume your brain is a motherboard. And, here's another question:

If, when you were born, your motherboard (your brain) were, indeed, completely flat, with no structures containing programming or commands on it, how did it happen that you have the thoughts, beliefs, worldviews, assumptions, expectations, inferences, biases, and most importantly, the values, you now have; that is, where did all the nodes, diodes and structures on the motherboard you use to navigate life and the world come from?

This is an especially important question if you are someone who considers themselves to be:

A free thinker
Spontaneous
Independent
Open-minded
Conscious
A "nobody's gonna tell me how to be…" type of individual

Those of us who have convinced ourselves we have created our own motherboards from scratch would be well-served to perhaps think again — and maybe really think and reflect for the first time.

In our world at work, at home, at play and in relationship, we all have specific beliefs and viewpoints that drive our behaviors.

In other words, we have a set of values and beliefs (nodes, diodes, programming, etc.) that support our stories about how we feel about such things as:

At work: delegation, giving and receiving feedback, vision and mission planning, relating and socializing, honesty, cheating, glass ceilings, intellectual property, hiring and firing, listening, open communication, career, collaborating and competing, affirmative action...

At home: chores, sex, money, fidelity, children, in-laws, cooking and diet, cleaning, organization, trust, exercise, travel, God…

At play: types of games/sports; team vs. individual, cheating, winning and losing, practicing…

In relationship: commitment, honesty, trust, safety, communication, sharing, fun, family, roles, men, women…

The deal is all of our behavior at work, at home, at play and in relationship is a function of what we have on our motherboards — our programming.

So, how did we come to create, or have, our programming, our values and our beliefs?

Ask lots of folks and they'll say they did it themselves. Especially those who fight to the death to assure everyone they "think for themselves". "I'm my own man/woman!" Hmmm. Really?

Being conscious and self-aware means taking a deep, long look at the notion of "I am who I think I am." and perhaps discovering that "I am who *someone else* wanted me to be" — by taking a microscopic look at each of the nodes and diodes on our motherboard and asking, "Hmm, how did this one get here?" "And this one?" "And this one?" "How did I become who I am?"

Such an exploration will undoubtedly lead to some interesting discoveries: that, for one thing, *someone else* in fact may own a particular node, or a particular diode; that *someone else* has crafted a particular node or particular diode; that I am really operating on someone else's value or belief that I have taken on that I think is "me".

Who is it really who controls what you think, feel, say and do? Who is it that really, really influences your choices and your decisions? How did you come to believe what you believe, how you feel and how you react and respond as you do to people, places, events and circumstances in your life — at work, at home, at play and in relationship?

How did you become known as: "the happy one", "the angry one", "the hard-nosed one", "the prejudiced one", "the political one", "the honest one", "the fearful one", "the risk-taker", "the selfish one", "the compassionate one", "the writer", "the artist", "the non-mathematical one", "the don't-go-into-law" one"?" How did you become the I am described in the phrase, "I am who I think I am?"

Have you ever consciously explored the life experiences and beliefs of your parents, extended family members, your teachers, your clergy members, those who had an influence on you in your childhood and formative years?

Have you ever consciously explored your experiences with your early bosses, or military leaders, and later on with politicians, the media, radio, the Internet, reality TV — all of which have had the opportunity to craft and mold the nodes and diodes on your motherboard in very subtle ways?

Have you ever, early on or later on, sold out your own nodes and diodes to others for a price? For example, who do you associate with, and why? What does that association get you? Do you ever lie, cheat or steal at work? If so, why? What's the belief underneath your actions? Did you ever marry for money? Why? Do you jeopardize your health? Why? Do you jeopardize your relationship? If so, using what belief or story?

Most often we have allowed others, often unconsciously, to buy real estate on our motherboard because first, as a child, it brought us mommy and daddy's love, appreciation, approval, and acceptance. So we replicated their nodes and diodes and soldered them to our own motherboard — so now we think, feel, and act the way they did and often find our life is unhappy and hard, while not really understanding why.

Or, later in adolescence and early adulthood, as we entered the world of work and more serious relationships, we replicated others' nodes and diodes out of guilt, or fear and often found, and find, our

life is unhappy and hard, while not really understanding why.

So, here we are, often living life at work, at home, at play and in relationship not knowing who we really, really are — disconnected from our True and Real Self because we have soldered so many others' nodes and diodes, beliefs, visions, thoughts and values to our own motherboard and think this is "me" or similarly taken *reactive* positions to others' influences and think this reactive stance is "me".

How do you know who you really are?

One way to begin to explore who you really are is by asking the following questions:

Do I have a closed mind? Is my mind always made up? Am I intolerant of others who don't see life as I do?

Do I see all of life as black and white? Am I rigid and inflexible, unforgiving and unbending, somewhat fanatical in my beliefs about life?

Do I use fear, guilt, manipulation, coercion and shame as weapons to get others to act in ways I feel they should act?

Am I opposed to differing perspectives, points of view and ideas?

By asking these questions and observing yourself, from outside yourself, you can begin to gain first-hand evidence of whose nodes and modules are on your motherboard.

And by asking these questions and observing yourself, from outside yourself, you can begin to gain first-hand evidence of *whose* nodes and modules are on your motherboard so you can consciously discern between:

- **I** think; therefore *I am*., and
- I think others' beliefs and thoughts; therefore I am who I think I am, which is not, in fact, *me.*

So, our $10 food for thought questions are:

- Choose a few of your deepest or strongest beliefs about work, life at home, play and relationships and ask yourself, "How did I actually come to have these beliefs?" "Do they really serve me well and bring me true and real happiness or a false happiness and false sense of security?"
- How have former bosses, politicians, the clergy, or TV and the media shaped my beliefs?
- Would others say I am open to opposing viewpoints?
- How did I come to have the beliefs I have around: money, career, friends, family, appearance, health, fun, love relationships, and spirituality?
- What stories about life at work, at home, at play and in relationship have I created based on my beliefs. Do my stories support my experience of fun, happiness, contentment and joy in my life? If not, do I prefer to keep my story to changing my belief? If so, why?
- Do I always need to be right?
- Am I gullible and easily deceived?
- Do I generally approach life with cynicism and skepticism?
- How well do I deal with change?
- When I listen to my inner judge and critic, whose voice do I most often hear (mother, father, primary caregiver, other)? What stories does that voice tell? And, are those stories true? Really?

- Do I consider myself to be a "free thinker? How did I arrive at this belief?

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