

Who I am, and How I can Influence Others

By Steven P. Arthur 65313-097 F-1

Who I am, on the surface, seems a simple question. Who are any of us? My knee-jerk answer: a prisoner, a father, a son, a brother and a friend. But these are just biological facts and labels. I am so much more. I am the totality of these labels, my thoughts, actions, experiences, dreams and something that I can't put into words. And it's that "something" that motivates me to learn more about who I am and how, if at all, I can positively influence others. Because how we influence other people is, in effect, a way of self discovery and creation. When we share our opinions, thoughts and ideas, we influence the same in others, essentially creating our own environment.

In the past I thought I knew who I was. Only to discover new facets of myself that lead me to even more. I am a special and unique combination of attributes, yet simultaneously all of my attributes can be found distributed among other people. Which only confirms that I have much more in common with my fellow man, then I have differences. We are all made up of many different, but equally important parts, that work together in society while influencing each other, intentionally or not. It seems the only control we have over influence is the degree and type.

Like many of you, my influence began before I was born. I know this because of my own children's influence over me. When my wife and I found out she was pregnant, I became more career minded and she began healthier eating and exercise habits. Our influence continues throughout life and sometimes afterwards.

Take for example some of the great influential people of our recent past: Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa. They continue to positively influence millions of people.

I haven't always taken seriously the influence I have on others and my environment, but I do now. My actions and how I spend my day speaks volumes of my personality, beliefs and thoughts. I believe my actions and words have the most impact. What I say and how I say it influences not only the person to whom I'm speaking, but also, those within audible range. If what I say conflicts with my actions; I lose credibility. I won't likely be taken seriously or will be met with skepticism.

It is my sincere hope that by candidly sharing some of who I am and my opinions I will influence others in a positive and constructive way. The poet Audre Lorde wrote. "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised and misunderstood. For it is not differences which immobilize us most, but silence." We can't be afraid to open up, so that we can see just how similar we really are. Being in prison doesn't exclude us from exercising tolerance, communication, and positive influence. Even here, we can endeavor to assist each other to shape our environment into a positive, educational, and corrective one.

I may never know entirely who I am, that's ok, perhaps I'm not intended to. But I know for certain who I am not, and that is a failure. I am no more defined by my failures than my triumphs. They are merely another part of, who I am.