

The seven levels of human identity

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Our sense of identity is determined by the associations we hold in our mind that allow us to place ourselves in time and space. Without a sense of our own identity we are lost. We do not know where we belong.

When we say, “I am this”, or “I am that”, we are indicating to ourselves and others the affiliations or associations that are important to us in our lives. We are also telling people indirectly who or what we care about. This in turn gives us an indication of what levels of consciousness we are operating from. This is why the question, “Who am I?” is so important. It gets us to focus on the associations that are meaningful to us in our lives.

From the perspective of “identity”, a person who is said to be operating for the common good is simply someone who is operating with an expanded sense of self-interest. This is the same as saying they are operating from a higher level of consciousness because the “self” that has the self-interest has taken on a more inclusive sense of identity.

As you evolve in breadth consciousness terms, you shift from making decisions based on what is good for you alone, to what is good for you *and* those with whom you *choose* to bond and associate, and while these decisions are all wrapped up in your own self-interest, they give the appearance of being driven by the common good.

What I am saying is that at the higher levels of consciousness your personal needs are still important, but you either satisfy them through focusing on the collective needs of the groups you associate yourself with or you subordinate some aspect of your personal needs for the benefit of a collective need that you consider to be more important. In other words, at these higher levels of consciousness, you recognise that your well being is best served by contributing to the well-being of the whole.

For example, a strong team is one in which everyone works for the good of the whole, and where our need for personal success is satisfied by the team’s success. Thus, you don’t seek glory for yourself, you seek glory for the team, and in that glory you find your own sense of self-esteem. This is the essence of the shift from “I” to “We”—working to satisfy the needs of those with whom you form a “We” so that you and everyone else who is part of the “We” can meet their needs.

This also turns out to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of the leaders Jim Collins talks about in *Good to Great*. He states that Good to Great leaders “channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It is not that they have no ego or self-interest. Indeed they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”

When we examine the shift from “I” to “We” from a “breadth” perspective, we can identify two main factors that differentiate levels of human consciousness. These are:

- The level of inclusiveness and connectedness you have towards others, and your physical environment; and
- The degree to which your conscious and subconscious fears separate you from others or undermine your sense of connectedness to others and your physical environment.

Fear prevents us from evolving because it promotes self-interest and separation. It restricts your sense of identity, and blocks your progress from “I” to “We.” The major inhibiting factors in this regard are a strong sense of racial identity, and/or religious affiliation. These issues arise from the fears we hold at the second and third level of human consciousness—fears associated with safety and belonging, and respect and authority.

Connectedness and love, on the other hand, promote evolution because they expand your sense of identity, and support your progress from “I” to an ever expanding sense of “We.” When you operate from the fourth level of identity, you are able to accept and celebrate ethnic diversity, *and* religious freedom.

Thus, the more inclusive your sense of identity and the less influenced you are by your conscious and unconscious fears, the higher will be the locus of the centre of gravity of consciousness that you operate from. The seven levels of identity are described in the following table, and explained in more detail in the text below.

Levels of Consciousness	Identity
7 Service	Self as a member of the human race, living on Earth and embracing full spectrum sustainability.
6 Making a difference	Self as a member of a community, and/or an affiliation of groups with shared values, aligned missions, and a common vision.
5 Internal cohesion	Self as a member of a group that shares the same values and a mission that aligns with your own sense of purpose and direction.
4 Transformation	Self as a member of a group that shares the same goals and values, and celebrates and encourages your unique abilities and talents.
3 Self-esteem	Self as a member or supporter of a group that aligns with your religious faith, interests and/or opinions.
2 Relationships	Self as member of a family or clan with a shared heritage, or ethnicity.
1 Survival	Self as an individual in a physical body seeking to meet your physiological needs.

Table: The seven levels of human identity

Level 1: Survival identity

At the first level of identity, you are concerned about the physiological needs of your body (food warmth, shelter, and comfort), and satisfying your security needs, and your pleasure/entertainment needs. You are concerned only about yourself, and your ability to survive, experience pleasure, and thrive.

Level 2: Relationship identity

At the second level of identity, you are concerned about the safety needs of yourself and those with whom you have a close relationship—your life partner, your family, your kin, your tribe or your co-workers. These are generally people who look like you, dress like you, and speak your language—in other words, people of your ethnic identity. You are concerned your own comfort, pleasure, and safety as well as those with whom you interact on a daily basis—those with whom you share a common heritage (ethnicity) or emotional bond of loyalty.

Level 3: Self-esteem identity

At the third level of identity, you are concerned about yourself and those with whom you share a common faith, interest or opinion. These groups may be multiple, and may vary over time—your old school, your organisation, your church, or your community. Other interest groups you might identify with could include a political party or a sports team. These are groups with whom you may or may not share a common ethnic identity. You are concerned about achievement, winning, your personal salvation, or promoting your point of view in your community, nation or the world.

Level 4: Transformation identity

At the fourth level of identity, you are concerned about yourself and those individuals with whom you have a shared set of values, and with whom you interact to achieve a shared set of goals—a team with a specific objective. This is a group that encourages and celebrates your unique abilities and talents. The group or team may be comprised of people of different ethnicities all sharing the same values and pursuing the same goals and objectives. You are concerned about your own self-expression, and your ability to build and manage the future you want for yourself through the success of the team.

Level 5: Internal cohesion identity

At the fifth level of identity, you are concerned about yourself and those individuals with whom you share a shared set of values, a shared sense of mission (purpose), and a shared sense of the future that you want to create together (vision). You recognise at this level of identity that your future success is wrapped up in the success of the group or groups that you have chosen to affiliate with. You are concerned about the level of trust and commitment in the group because you know that this impacts the group's capacity for setting a strong intention and galvanising action. You are concerned about your ability to work on what you believe is important.

Level 6: Making a difference identity

At the sixth level of identity, you are concerned about yourself, and your group, your community, as well as those groups that are external to your group that have similar values, aligned missions, and/or a shared vision of the future. You recognise the importance of forming strategic alliances or partnerships with other like-minded individuals or groups to gain leverage in furthering your

collective purpose or vision. You are concerned about building the internal capacities of your group through mentoring or coaching those with whom you work, and you are also concerned about building a culture of collaboration with your partners and the groups that form part of your strategic alliance. You are concerned about your ability to leverage your impact on the world.

Level 7: Service identity

At the seventh level of identity, you are concerned about yourself, your group, the groups that your group is in partnership with, and everyone else on the planet—the whole of humanity—every race, religion, and creed. At this level, your identity also expands to include the Earth and all life forms that inhabit the Earth because you recognise that your well-being and the well-being of everyone on the planet is dependent on a healthy global ecosystem. The experience that you have gained in your journey to this higher level of consciousness gives you the wisdom to become an elder in your community or a counsellor in the arena in which you operate. You want to achieve a sense of joy in your life by fulfilling your purpose.

Having described the seven levels of human consciousness from the identity or breadth perspective, let us now explore the seven levels of human consciousness from the depth or motivation perspective.