



AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO USING THE “IF YOU REALLY KNEW ME” ACTIVITY CREATED BY CHALLENGE DAY

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND OTHER PEOPLE DESIRING MORE CONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS

Separation, isolation and loneliness are enormous challenges for any human being. For young people, however, these feelings can be devastating to physical and mental health, leading many down the paths of self-harm, addiction, bullying or violence. Under these conditions, academic learning becomes virtually impossible. What causes separation, this profound feeling of loneliness and isolation that so many of our adolescents struggle with daily? The answer is simple....FEAR.

It is one thing to know a person’s title, accomplishments, successes or “image.” It is entirely different to connect to their humanity, to learn the intimate details about them that you would know if you really knew them. Many people are so afraid of getting vulnerable or, as we say at Challenge Day, “getting real,” that they end up settling for superficial relationships and conversations rather than risking the possibility of sharing more personally, and then perhaps being rejected. People often compare their “insides” to other people’s “outsides,” and relate image-to-image rather than heart-to-heart. As a result, many of us spend our lives feeling separate and alone.

-from “Be The Hero You’ve Been Waiting For,” p.49
by Yvonne and Rich Dutra-St.John

What if the solution to the challenges of separation, isolation and loneliness was as simple as taking a couple of minutes each day to connect with those people around us? Students are surrounded by others constantly, usually spending more time with their peers and teachers than with their own families. Often, we simply don’t take the time to foster genuine connection with those around us.

On the new MTV series, “If You Really Knew Me,” students and adults begin to connect with each other beyond their “image” (see below) by using some powerful connection-building tools that we use at Challenge Day. One of them is to simply have each person in any group complete the sentence, “If you really knew me (IYRKM), you would know that...” While there is additional programming that happens off-camera in a Challenge Day to help create the conditions of safety and comfort, which is needed to get the participants to share as vulnerably as they do on the show, there are other ways to tailor the “IYRKM” tool for any group - be it in a classroom, at a dinner table or in casual conversation. The simplicity of the lead-in sentence naturally opens a doorway to connections that break through separation and isolation and create environments where learning and growth thrive.

THE ICEBERG, THE IMAGE AND THE COST OF HIDING YOURSELF

Many of us live our lives as if we are icebergs, floating aimlessly in the sea of life and largely submerged. We hide most of ourselves, especially our most vulnerable places, below “the waterline.” Like a typical iceberg, we show only about 10% of ourselves, the part above the water. For the purpose of this discussion, let’s call this 10% our “image.”

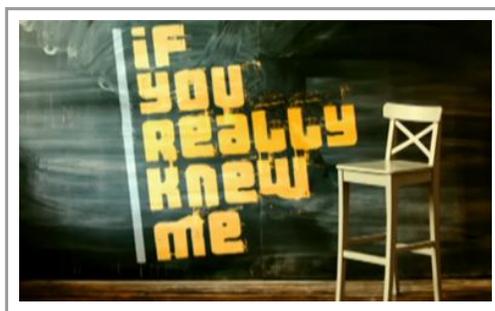
- from “Be The Hero You’ve Been Waiting For,” pp. 53-54
by Yvonne and Rich Dutra-St.John

There is nothing wrong with having an image. We all do. Our image is the way in which we choose to represent ourselves to those around us and is often tied to the things we do. For students, there are many choices, from “jock” to “class clown” to “trouble-maker” to “shy kid” to “nerd” to “skater” to “cheerleader,” to “emo” and many, many more titles. Adults have their own versions, often tied to their jobs - teacher, parent, administrator, coach, etc. The problem is not that we have an image. The problem lies in the way many of us pretend that our image is ALL that we are, leaving the other roughly 90% of us hidden beneath “the waterline.”

We are so afraid of being hurt or judged that we often would rather suffer in our “comfort zone” (or in our image) - than to take a risk and be honest about who we really are - our hopes, our dreams, our fears, our disappointments, our joys, and the multitude of other parts of our inner-lives. The cost of this internalization is that much of who we are and what we experience as human beings is missed.

Without honesty or authenticity, it is difficult to form the genuine connections that we long for, leaving many to feel empty or lonely. Many young people we work with describe feeling “trapped” or “imprisoned” by their images and talk about seeking escapes from these painful feelings. Still others report a belief that the thoughts and feelings they are having internally are unique to them, that there must be something wrong with them because nobody else seems to be having the same ones. This sense of isolation can, and does, drive many young ones into some incredibly destructive choices.

At Challenge Day, we believe that the biggest problems in schools are not drinking, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, violence or self-mutilation. We believe these are actually the symptoms of much bigger problems - namely, SEPARATION, ISOLATION AND LONELINESS. It is only when we feel one of these three, or a couple in combinations, that we act out in those other ways. Unfortunately, young people today are dealing with more than ever and need safe places to talk, to connect with each other and let more of themselves be seen and acknowledged. But even as painful as it is, it is more comfortable to stay trapped in the image - even seen as “cool” or “tough” than it is to take a risk and step out of your comfort zone. Learning is difficult in this environment.



THE RISK-REWARD FACTOR: THE BENEFITS OF USING THE “IYRKM...” TOOL

For the individual, taking the risk to share more of who we really are - underneath “the waterline” - deepens our relationships and builds intimacy through genuine connection. It also helps us find REAL FREEDOM - beyond the freedom to eat fast food or wear the labels we want on our clothes. We get to experience the freedom to be ourselves, to embrace our full humanity and to live our lives 100% fully alive.

For groups, such as a classroom or a family, taking the risk to connect can help build a sense of community and in doing so combats the separation, isolation and loneliness that so many young ones struggle with. When the iceberg is inverted and people show more of themselves, there is a greater sense of safety for people to be themselves. Where there is safety and connection, the learning process can once again thrive.

USING THE IYRKM TOOL

The tool itself is as simple as asking the question, “What would I know if I really knew you?” and giving EVERYONE an equal opportunity to answer, whether it is with a group or with a partner (dyad). In Challenge Day, we give each participant a minimum of 2 minutes to answer the question repeatedly. Each person uses their turn to complete the sentence, “If you really knew me, you would know...” as many times as they can in their allotted time. (This can be modified for the classroom, dinner table, or any place else by shortening the time or having each partner to take a turn completing it one phrase at a time for a set period of time).

The question can be modified depending on the setting you are in. Some alternatives include, “If you really knew me, you would know...”

- I am proud of...
- That the hardest thing I have ever done is...
- One piece of good news from my life this week is...
- My relationship with my family is...
- That what I find most difficult about coming to school is...
- What I love most about school is...
- That my biggest dream is...
- The person I feel closest to is ...
- If I had three wishes, I would wish for...
- The funniest thing I can remember happening is...
- The way most people see me or label me is...
- Someone who surprised me by how different than I thought they were is...

A few helpful reminders when using these tools:

Modeling is your best teaching tool. The more ‘real’ you are willing to be, the more safety you will create for your students or family members and the more ‘real’ they are likely to be in response. Be aware that not everyone is at the same level. Some people can be uncomfortable or feel ambushed. Be willing to go first and share something about yourself.

Make everyone right. Bring a “you cannot do it wrong” attitude (as long as it’s true). In order to create a world where everyone feels safe, loved and celebrated, people need to have permission to be met where they are **EVEN IN SILENCE**.

Practice the art of listening. Do not give advice and do not try to “fix” anybody. The gift of listening is so powerful, you will be amazed at what happens when we simply offer to listen. Stay away from group discussions, which often lead to the same voices talking over the quiet ones. Let every person have their full turn **NO MATTER WHAT**. If it is silence, then let it be silent. It may be uncomfortable, but for the person whose turn it is, silence may be an incredibly powerful share.

The truth can be so liberating, emotions and tears may come. Welcome them, for they are a tool our body was given to heal itself. In the rare occasion when someone's healing process becomes overwhelming for them, be prepared to help them find professional help.

Set a container for time for this activity ensure that each person has the same amount of time to participate. This will establish equality and respect for each participant. Even if someone finishes early, repeat the question, "And what else?" or ask them open-ended questions such as "who do you live with?" or "what do you love to do?"

THE CHALLENGE

Find ways to challenge the students/family members to bring this tool into their life. If you are a teacher, consider offering credit for a student who is willing to get out of their comfort zone and meet someone new. Challenge them to find one person outside of their normal social group and ask them the question, "If I really knew you, what would I know about you?"

If you have other questions about this activity or Challenge Day, please contact office@challengeday.org or visit us at www.challengeday.org.

THANK YOU FOR BEING THE CHANGE!

