

LABELS – The Pros and Cons

Phil Pons WBCCI 1057

We use labels to categorize, classify, and group people, activities and organizations. It is our “short hand” way of making life manageable. If we did not do that, we would be overwhelmed by the abundance of stimuli that reaches our eyes, ears and other senses. In short, labels or categories are essential to our wellbeing.

The issue then is not that we label, but that we rarely take time to analyze the effect of these labels on our relationships with the outside world. In fact, often we are completely unaware of the impact of these labels on our thinking, our attitudes and our relationships.

The first point, and a critical concept, we might consider is the notion that labels not only **describes** our impression of or attitude towards another person or object, the label also **prescribes** our behavior towards that person or object. We can relate to this when we reflect upon some person or object that we do not care for. Regardless of what that person does or says, we view that statement or event through a “dislike coated” lens. It biases our critical thinking and it creates a tendentious reference point for evaluation.

I say this to make a point concerning our Club, WBCCI. There seems to be a tendency on the part of many members to resort to labels when referencing others within the Club.

Persons working to effectively manage the Club, often at great personal expense in time, energy and money, are unfavorably labeled as elitist, entitled, aloof, and “remote.” Consequently, they are viewed and treated in a manner reflecting these labels.

Persons offering suggestions and well-meaning comments are viewed as being “negative” and out to destroy the Club. As an aside, I suggest that comments that are skewed towards the negative are frequently a result of frustration with not being heard or perceived as not being heard. None-the-less, these people are discounted and their views are whimsically dismissed.

WBCCI might benefit from a healthy dose of *Argumentation*. This is not the same as the present day conception that argumentation is both quarrelsome and adversarial.

For any argument to be beneficial, it must follow specific norms. First it should begin with an agreement that there is a common goal.

I believe that we have that in WBCCI. I have yet to find a person in our Club that does not want WBCCI to continue to exist and to provide continued travel, adventure and camaraderie. At the same time, no rational person believes that the continued decline in membership will result in the continuance of the Club. Therefore, it appears as though we

share a common goal and that is the survival and growth of WBCCI.

It follows that the issues and disagreeable attitudes stem from a divergence of views on the methods of accomplishing that goal. I submit that fruitful argumentation can lead to decisions beneficial to WBCCI provided we agree to and abide by certain criteria.

We should remind ourselves that our positions or views are uncertain; they are controversial and have multiple dimensions. They are *subjective* and not *objective*. They are merely claims that require justification which may or may not be convincing.

The atmosphere for these claims should be cooperative; we share a common goal and we are interested in reaching the best possible means to accomplish our goal. This requires critical thinking. It requires an open-minded approach to each other's views. It includes being

aware that labeling others as "elitist" or "negative" or any other descriptive label can and does slant our reception and evaluation of their input.

Finally, we must be willing to assume the risk that we could be wrong! After a cooperative exchange of views and a critical evaluation of justifications presented, it just might make sense to realize that we should compromise or even change our view; we just might lose the argument.

Acceptance of being wrong is difficult for some. I suggest the reason for this difficulty originates with the perception that our "justifications" are proof. They are not "proof" as in scientific terms, they are strictly opinions. When we lose sight of this, we are unable or unwilling to accept any view other than our own.

Can we give this some thought?