

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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By James Collins

What's in a name you ask? This is how people know you, and it is how you are remembered. Throughout history, exceptional people are remembered by their name. The great conquerors like Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Genghis Kahn, and Attila the Hun are infamous and tales of their cruelty remain to this day. Religious leaders like Jesus, Moses, and Mohammed have millions of followers in their religions. Doctors such as Pasteur and Jonas Salk are also remembered. Some celebrities are remembered by a single name such as Elvis, Madonna, Valentino, and Ike. However, there are some people's name that causes them nothing but derision, laughter and bullying. These responses overwhelm their natural personality. For example, a very intelligent engineer lives in Brooklyn and is a very nice person. His family in the past immigrated to America from the Austrian Hungarian Empire where the language was German and included a number of other Slavic dialects. In that environment, his name was perfectly normal and caused no concern or humor. Unfortunately, his name in English causes people's head to turn when announced. His name was Sheldon Shitken.

Sheldon grew up in a Jewish enclave in New York where the name was not unusual and did not cause too much attention. However, high school and college were very different environments and was where the bullying started. This continued into work where the verbal jabs continued on a daily basis.

"Sheldon Shitken, you have got to be kidding me. Where did you get a name like that? Your mother and father must've been real pranksters. For God's sake, your initials are SS. Don't you people remember the Holocaust and the Nazis who killed you by the millions? You have those initials on your briefcase and your tiepin and your Signet ring. All the other Jews around you must hate you. Why don't you change your name? Shitken has got to go."

"You're just like all the others you make fun of my last name. In the area of Poland, we originally came from that was a very standard name and there were other people who had different sounding names which don't ring clear in this country. I have a good friend name Lipchitz and he gets the same kind of pestering and bullying. I am not about to change my name just because you don't like it."

This hounding and needling had gone on for the four years of high school, four years of college and more than 10 years in the industrial engineering complex. Sheldon had enough!

At a department meeting one morning, Shitken stood up to his full 5'6" height, puffed out his chest and announced, "To all you supposed friends who keep picking on me because of my name and my initials, I am telling you for the last time I am sick of the bullying, the innuendos, and the snickering. I am going to have my name formally changed. In fact I have initiated the process at the local courthouse and by the end of next week I will have my new name."

"Tell us what it will be," stated the department head.

"Not until it is formally and legally changed by the state of New York. I don't want anybody second-guessing what I selected, or trying to tell me what he or she think I should be called. This is my decision and nobody is going to change my mind or influence what is in the works." Shitken was adamant. He would not tell anybody what his new name might be. He would not give in. Every question as to his new name generated a sly smile. He became a sphinx. Nothing could draw a conversation out of Shitken about his decision. Then the day came. Sheldon had announced the day before that he had to go to the courthouse to get the formal papers signed and be sworn in before a judge. When Sheldon arrived in the office, every head turned and all work stopped. The department head took control, stood up, welcomed Shitken, and asked him to address the crowd and announce his new name.

"To all of you who asked me to change my name over the years, I like to formally announce you win. I am no longer Sheldon Shitken, I am now Lothar Shitken."

THE END