

Be careful: labels may become self-fulfilling prophecies



**JERRY CAMMARATA
IS SUPERPOP**

ONE OF THE MOST powerful tools human beings have in trying to give some order and meaning to the environment is the employment of labels. Using a label gives something or someone an identification. It attempts to contribute attributes, a set of conditions, distinctiveness, and, in some cases of labeling, a degree of sameness.

The tool of labeling has its most impressive application with children. From the time neonates are just months old, to certainly their first year and beyond, children attempt to selfishly use (and rightfully so) the labeling system. This system reduces their insecurities in an overbearing world. They use the label or word to develop their own position in relation to everything else.

It is the adult community, however, that must be aware of the importance of labeling and how to communicate labels to children. At each stage of a child's life, the labeling system will change. For example, between the ages of nine months and one year, you can use a one-word labeling strategy. Each thing you give the child should be identified: hand him a spoon and say spoon. The repetition of this practice will eventually teach the child the label for spoon and more

importantly, give him confidence of how supportive the spoon can be in his conduct of eating. Certainly, don't ever be afraid of dishing out too many labels.

As they are regularly repeated day after day, the child will rise to the occasion of learning and begin to use words like a trooper. Of course, you better be prepared to respond to the child's request when he uses a word (label)—after all, that's why he is using language.

As your child grows older, the game of labeling or name calling becomes more sophisticated. Wait until your son or daughter is in high school and asks you for the chemical name for salt. You will go into shock. That feeling of insecurity and inadequacy you will have very much parallels what a child goes through when he cannot understand or identify something.

Negative labeling

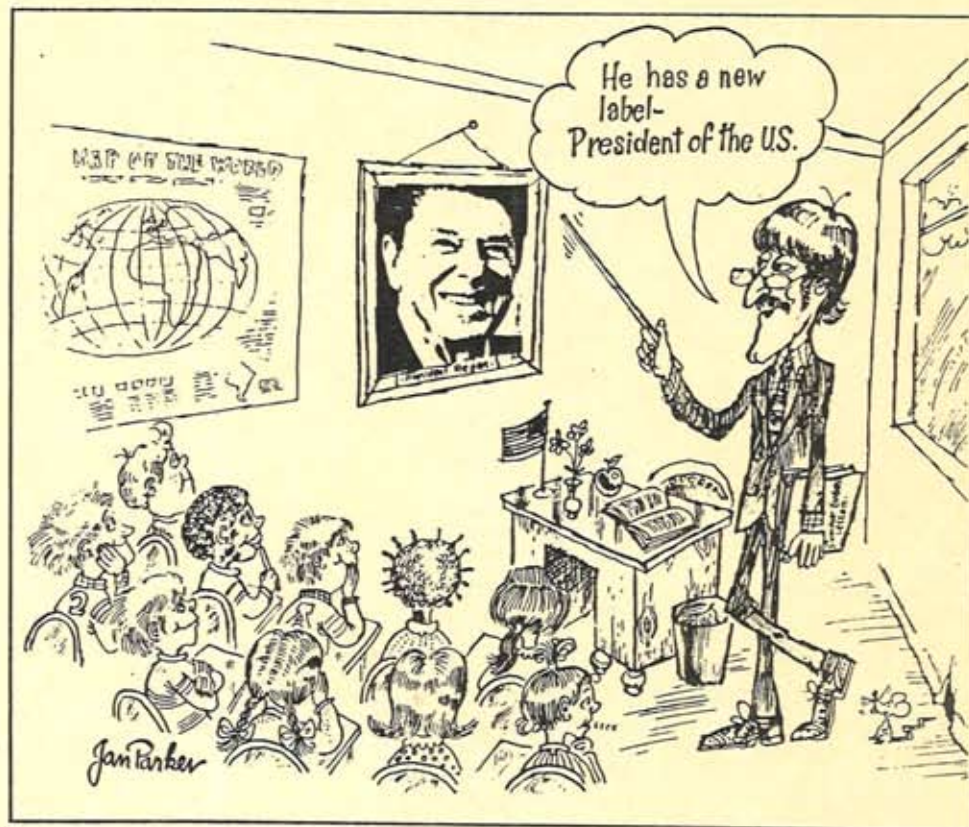
It is important to address a negative component of labeling. Some times we get carried away with giving everything a name and we impose certain descriptive words that can do more harm than good. One example of this is calling people names. Since children do pick up habits, good and bad, from adults, we have to be very careful of

what we say and how we address others. How often have we called another a "jerk" or "stupid." It is very possible these name callings could destroy a person's ego and create a feeling of inadequacy. Thus, by omitting this negative labeling from our language usage, our children may have a better role model of labeling and be encouraged to address issues when they speak and not rely on personal attacks.

Another example of negative labeling is referring to our children with a handicap by using the name of the handicap. Thus, a child with dyslexia is called dyslexic. In a more dramatic sense, a stuttering child becomes a stutterer. This means that we are teaching that child to believe he is a freak, different or unusual, unlike his friends. This negative uniqueness that has been created will slowly eat away at the youngster. Interestingly, it can be almost impossible to get a dysfluent child to stop stuttering if he perceives himself as a stutterer. He will perpetuate his disability and live up to the label he has been given. We would be well advised, therefore, not to label negatively.

Family labeling

And as a family, we may wish to consider not labeling our own different forms. Is it practical and wise to say this is a single parent family, or this is a two wage earner family, among others? Could families with these labels be perceived by themselves, the community, or the government as having no stability and



being a liability to social progress? Whether it be blood or a legal family, love makes it work and a joy to experience. The label should be family—that is all that matters.

Whatever the labeling asset or crisis may be, there is one thing that is perhaps the most ignored by our society and important to the survival of American industry. Remember:

"Look for the union label when you are buying..."

When you are looking for the labels you need, choose wisely and compassionately.