

'Down' is all in the eye of the beholder

By choosing to spend less time in paid employment, I am labeled as a "downshifter" (The Age, 11/1/03). I think the Australian Institute think tank should think again.

The label "downshifter" implies a process of moving down and thereby misrepresents a positive life choice. After all, the only thing to go down is income. Quality of life, personal relationships, community participation and peace of mind (among many other things) all go up.

Those who apply labels to people must recognise that there is often a stigma attached to these labels. These labels can not only change a person's self-identification but also change the way others see them. As such, labeling often separates people by highlighting our differences in a negative way.

For those who work long hours to create these labels, I suggest a long dog walk or a day at the beach with friends. It may help them to shift their thinking.

Letter to Age, 13th January 2003