

Why Personal Core Values Are Important

Values are a part of us. They highlight what we stand for. They can represent our unique, individual essence.

Values guide our behaviour, providing us with a personal code of conduct.

When we honour our personal core values consistently, we experience fulfillment.

When we don't, we are incongruent and are more likely to escape into bad habits and regress into childish behaviour to uplift ourselves.

Knowing Your Personal Values Changes Your Behaviour

It wasn't until I was 40 that I first went through a values discovery process. I had always believed that I 'knew' what my values were and so they never required too much active consideration. All that changed when I went through a life crisis and came to the unceremonious realisation that I was living far from my values and purpose.

This self-talk regarding my values created a mask that I was able to default to, convincing myself that I was the type of person who would ALWAYS live inside my values. The truth was I wasn't, and the main reason was that I had never really considered what my true values were and how I should act and react in accordance with them. Of course I knew the type of person I wanted to be but were these *my* values, a conditioned set of socially accepted characteristics or a complete falsehood.

By working to establish my TRUE values I was able to understand that many of the inadequacies, fears, depressions, stresses and anxieties I was feeling were because I was not living congruently, or even consciously, through my own values. I wasn't a bad person because of this, I just wasn't able to live in a peaceful place within myself.

One value that rose to the top of my list was family – this may even be high on your list. I have always maintained that family was important to me and my values exercise proved this to me, however when I began to explore my actions over the past year, 5 or 10 I was unfortunately surprised by the amount of times I had sacrificed 'family' for something else I believed was important or pretended that in some way would be of benefit to my family – you know, working longer hours to make more money so my family could have everything they wanted (except of course time with me, because I was working).

I committed to cultivating a better relationship with all those important to me and began making conscious decisions about where and when I spent my time – and what I was truly bringing to my family because of it.

Clarifying this value as a top priority shifted many things in my life. It certainly changed my appreciation of time and created an understanding of what being happy meant – not just for me, but for others around me.

You may find you have similar experiences across your own values. It's not that you don't appreciate your values, or even that you have ignored them, but perhaps you have just begun to make decisions that have 'subconsciously' favoured things other than your most important values, or convinced yourself that your behaviours somehow return you to your values.

Exploring your values honestly can be difficult and somewhat painful – it isn't always pleasant to discover you have been making decisions that lead you away from your values and potentially have influenced your negative space.

There is an enormous benefit though. When you find and acknowledge your TRUE values, you no longer have to wrestle with managing impulse control as much, decision making becomes much easier and clearer and ultimately you free up all the space in your mind that was formerly occupied by doubt and negativity – you now know who you are, who you are working towards and how your decisions influence that outcome.

Simple, but not always easy.

Many people value comfort. When people value **comfort over growth**, they are less likely to apply effort to grow. **Breaking through resistance** to growth isn't uncomfortable if you value the outcome or process. Consider what happens when people value comfort over their health. Eating to “feel better” will cause poor eating habits that undermine their health.

Discover Your Personal Core Values

Most of us don't know our values. We don't understand what's most important to us. Instead, we focus on what our society, culture, and media values.

Can you articulate your top 5 values that are most important to *you*?

Without undergoing a discovery process, it's challenging to identify your personal core values.

It's easy to speculate and idealise what you *should* value. But knowing and accepting what you value takes effort.

While the following process is best done with a **qualified coach**, you can do it on your own if you apply self-honesty, patience, and determination.

Ready? Take out your journal, a notepad, or a note-taking app. And let's get started.

Here are 7 steps to creating distinct and meaningful core values that will serve you in every area of your life and work:

STEP 1: Start with a Beginner's Mind

It's too easy to presume that we know the answer at the start and to, therefore, never embark on a creative, personal discovery process.

Adopt the **mind of a beginner**—someone with no preconceived notions of what is—to give you access to inner truths to which your conscious mind is yet unaware.

Take a deep breath and empty your mind. Remember that your conscious mind doesn't have all the answers. Create a space for new insights and revelations to emerge.

Getting in right mental and emotional state is an essential first step.

STEP 2: Create Your List of Personal Values

Arriving at a concise and short list of personal values can be a daunting task. You can find lists online with almost 400 values to choose from.

However, I don't advise using any predetermined lists.

Why? Values aren't selected; we *discover* and *reveal them*. If you start with a list, your conscious mind will test which values appear "better" than others.

That said, if you're not familiar with working with values, you can scan a list of values to get a sense of your range of options.

We have included a list of over 220 core values.

To help you uncover your own personal core values, here are three processes you can try:

1) Peak Experiences

Consider a meaningful moment—a peak experience that stands out.

What was happening to you?

What was going on?

What values were you honouring at this time?

2) Suppressed Values

Now, go in the opposite direction; consider a time when you got angry, frustrated, or upset.

What was going on? What were you feeling? Now flip those feelings around.

What value is being suppressed?

3) Code of Conduct

What's most important in your life? Beyond your basic human needs, what *must* you have in your life to experience fulfillment?

Creative self-expression? A strong level of health and vitality? A sense of excitement and adventure?

Surrounded by beauty? Always learning?

What are the personal values you must honour or a part of you withers?

STEP 3: Chunk Your Personal Values into Related Groups

Combining all the answers from step 2, you now have a master list of personal values. Maybe there are between 20 and 40 values on your list.

That's too many to be actionable.

Your next step is to group these values under related themes.

Values like accountability, responsibility, and timeliness are all related.

Values like learning, growth, and development relate to each other.

Connection, belonging, and intimacy are related too. Group them together.

STEP 4: Highlight the Central Theme of Each Value Group

If you have a group of values that include honesty, transparency, integrity, candour, directness, and truth, select a word that best represents the group.

For example, integrity might work as a central theme for the values I listed.

You can keep the other words in the group in parentheses to give your primary value more context. You'll use them again in step 6.

STEP 5: Determine Your Top Personal Core Values

Now comes the hardest part. After completing step 4, you still may have a sizable list of values. Here are a few questions to help you whittle your list down:

- What values are *essential* to your life?
- What values represent your *primary way of being*?
- What values are essential to supporting your inner self?

As a unique individual, you possess certain **strengths** and weaknesses. Your values matter most to *you*.

How many core values should you end up with? Too few and you won't capture all the unique dimensions of your being. Too many and you'll forget them or won't take advantage of them.

While the number of core values differs for each person, the magic range seems to be between 5 and 10.

Rank them in the order of importance. This is often the most challenging part.

You may need to do this step in multiple sittings. After doing one round of ranking put it aside and "sleep on it."

Revisit your ranking the next day and see how it sits with you. Then, go through the process again.

STEP 6: Give Your Personal Values Richer Context

Now, creativity comes into play.

Highlighting values into memorable phrases or sentences helps you articulate the meaning behind each value.

It gives you the opportunity to make the value more emotional and memorable.

Here are a few tips and guidelines for crafting your values statements:

- **Use inspiring words and vocabulary.** Our brains are quick to delete or ignore the mundane and commonplace.
- **Mine for words that evoke and trigger *emotional responses*.** They will be more meaningful and memorable.
- **Play to your strengths** in crafting your values.
- **Make your value statements rich and meaningful** to you so they inspire you to uphold them.

You could use other words from the groupings you made in step 3 in your description.

For example, let's say you've identified a core value of health to represent other values, like energy and vitality.

Your values statement might be: "Health: to live with full vitality and energy every day."

STEP 7: Test the Ecology of Each Value

Once you've completed your list of core values, walk away from them and revisit them the next day after a good night's sleep. Review your list:

- How do they make you feel?

- Do you feel they are consistent with who you are?
- Are they personal to you?
- Do you see any values that feel inconsistent with your identity (as if they belong to someone else, like an authority figure or society) and not you?
- Check your priority ranking. Do you feel like your values are in the proper order of importance?

Nothing is final. Make any tweaks and changes as necessary.

Now you have a prioritised list of your top 5 to 10 core values, let's see how well you're living them.

From a **centred position**, assess how well you're honouring each value by scoring each one on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 represents optimally living the value.

What's your level of satisfaction with each value?

Record your score for each. You can set up a table in Excel or an online survey.

Date the top of the column. Repeat this exercise once a month or quarter to assess your progress.

Ranked Value	Value/ Description	Score (1-10)	Date	Action Steps (to Increase Score)
1	Health & Wellbeing	8	1/20/16	Practice conscious breathing every morning
2	Learning / Growth	8	1/20/16	Read 2 books / month
3	Integrity / Honesty	6	1/20/16	Do shadow work exercises every night
4	Creativity	7	1/20/16	Schedule time each week for creative writing
5	Adventure	6	1/20/16	Plan a trip to South America

If you score below 7 in a particular value, what changes do you need to make? What has to happen for you to further honour this value?

Here's where self-coaching comes into play. Define your goals. Create a plan. Actualise it.

Check in with your personal values again. Notice if you feel a difference in your level of fulfillment in life.

How to Use Your Core Values to Make Decisions

Knowing your personal core values and their order of priority is helpful in making difficult decisions.

Start by scoring your values as described above. Then, imagine your life several months or years from now having decided.

For example, what will your new business or a family change your life?

Step into this future picture as much as you can. Have it come alive in your mind.

Now, score your personal values while keeping the vision alive in your mind. Does deciding elevate your values score? Does it cause friction with one of your higher values?

This process will help bring a new level of clarity to your decision-making process.