



DEFINING AND LIVING YOUR CORE VALUES

What is important to you? This is not a rhetorical question.

Your core values lie at the very center of who you are. If you've heard the expression "moral compass," core values provide direction for that compass. When what you do *and* what you value are in sync, your life is integrated and the direction and purpose of your life are easy to articulate and pursue.

In relation to managing your time and/or unstuffing your life, once you know your core values, you can eliminate activities that don't align with those values. That might include accumulating things that don't really serve you or support you in achieving your goals or spending time on activities that distract you from accomplishing the things you're passionate about or paid to do. Or doing things you are passionate about but not adequately compensated for, and then feeling like a martyr or growing resentful. You may at any time experience acting in opposition to your core values for any number of reasons—feeling that you "should" do something you know isn't right, or doing something you're "expected" to do, when you feel pressured or when you feel you have no choice, or even without thinking, because it's something you've always done.

What follows are some questions and a list of values. The values list is not exhaustive, but it's comprehensive. If something is missing from it, feel free to write it in.

There are no universally right or preferred answers. The right answers are the truthful answers for you. If you value something that you judge as unappealing or wrong or stupid, either shift your feeling or shift your values. Circle fifteen words to begin with, from the list below, that most strongly express the principles you value.

Abundance	Candor	Cooperation
Aesthetics	Caring	Courage
Acceptance	Casual	Creativity
Accomplishment	Challenge	Decency
Accountability	Charity	Dedication
Accuracy	Chastity	Democracy
Achievement	Clarity	Determination
Adaptability	Cheerfulness	Dependability
Adventure	Cleanliness	Dignity
Affability	Cleverness	Discipline
Altruism	Collaboration	Diversity
Ambition	Commitment	Ease
Appreciation	Community	Education
Articulation	Compassion	Effectiveness
Assertiveness	Competence	Efficiency
Authenticity	Competitiveness	Elegance
Balance	Composure	Empathy
Benevolence	Conscientiousness	Energy
Beauty	Consideration	Entrepreneurship
Boldness	Consistency	Environmental concern
Calmness	Constancy	Equality
Camaraderie	Contribution	Ethics
		Excellence

Excitement	Kindness	Relaxation
Fairness	Leadership	Reliability
Faith	Learning	Resourcefulness
Fame	Liberty	Resiliency
Family	Listening	Respect
Fidelity	Location	Responsibility
Financial growth	Love	Responsiveness
Financial security	Loyalty	Righteousness
Flexibility	Mindfulness	Sacrifice
Fortitude	Moderation	Safety
Freedom	Nature	Security
Friendship	Naturalness	Self-control
Fulfillment	Obedience	Self-esteem
Fun	Open communication	Self-sufficiency
Generosity	Openness	Sensitivity
Gentleness	Opportunity	Serenity
Gracefulness	Order	Service
Graciousness	Originality	Simplicity
Gratitude	Passion	Sincerity
Growth	Patience	Sobriety
Happiness	Peace	Spirituality
Health	Perception	Stability
Holiness	Perseverance	Stamina
Honesty	Persistence	Status
Honor	Personal Growth	Stewardship
Hope	Philanthropy	Strength
Humility	Power	Success
Humor	Practicality	Support
Independence	Pragmatism	Survival
Industriousness	Precision	Teachability
Influence	Professionalism	Teamwork
Informal	Profitability	Thoughtfulness
Ingenuity	Prosperity	Tolerance
Initiative	Purposefulness	Tradition
Inner harmony	Prudence	Tranquility
Innovation	Punctuality	Transparency
Insightfulness	Quality	Trust
Intelligence	Reason	Trustworthiness
Integrity	Receptivity	Truth
Intimacy	Recognition	Understanding
Joy	Reconciliation	Uniqueness
Justice	Relationships	Unity

Virtue	Wealth	Wit
Vitality	Wholeness	Zeal
Vulnerability	Willingness	
Warmth	Wisdom	

Please write your answers to the following questions in a notebook or a separate piece of paper.

1. Imagine yourself at the end of your life—no pain or drama (this isn't an acting class!), just the culmination of a long, well-lived life. Looking back, what are the three most resonant and meaningful memories that you have—good or bad, happy or sad? What are the three most important lessons that you've learned from these memories? What makes each of them so significant? Imagine you're going to share this information with the person you love the most so they might benefit from your experiences.
2. Think of someone you deeply respect and admire—you may never have met them. Write down five qualities that they possess that most define them for you. Give examples of those qualities in action.
3. Think of a mentor or someone who has influenced your thinking and choices in a fundamental way. Write down five qualities that they possess that most define them for you. Give examples of those qualities in action.
4. Describe a time when you were particularly proud of how you participated in something, when you felt you were your best self. List the qualities that you exhibited.
5. What do you want to be remembered for?
6. If resources and access were not obstacles, what would you choose to do with your life?
7. What do you love to do, what makes you the happiest, what are you most passionate about?
8. What do you want to accomplish in the world?
9. What do you want to give back to the world?

Now, of the first fifteen words you selected, and of everything else you've written above, what are your top five values? What are the five qualities that you cannot imagine living without, that's how essential they are to who and how you want to be. Write them either here or in your notebook.

These values are at the very center of who you are. And that's most definitely not stuff.

Aligning With Your Core Values

Now that you know what's important to you and have a clearer understanding of what you value, it's time to put those analytical skills to use on something practical.

If you value love and kindness and find that you're mostly scared and resentful, how do you get from here to there? What are the choices you need to make to shift your conscious or unconscious stance from one of resistance to one of receptivity? How do you let things go that you don't value or don't serve you to make room for and embrace the things that you do value and will serve you?

There are no universal answers to the above questions. What I believe are universal tools for discovering the answers are open-mindedness, willingness, honesty and quiet reflection. You don't need to become a monk to sit still long enough to hear something beneath the constant chatter of your mind. Five minutes of doing seemingly nothing besides sitting quietly and reflecting on the answers to the questions above (as well as others that may start to come to you once you begin this process) can quiet your thoughts down enough to reveal more direction. Please try it now.