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  Clarity  Democracy
Achievement  Cheerfulness  Determination
Adaptability  Cleanliness  Dependability
Adventure  Cleverness  Dignity
Affability  Collaboration  Discipline
Altruism  Commitment  Diversity
Ambition  Compassion  Ease
Appreciation  Competence  Education
Articulation  Competitiveness  Effectiveness
Assertiveness  Cooperation  Efficiency
Authenticity  Competence  Elegance
Balance  Consideration  Empathy
Benevolence  Composition  Energy
Beauty  Consistent  Entrepreneurship
Boldness  Consideration  Environmental concern
Calmness  Consistency  Ethics
Camaraderie  Constancy  Excellence

Cooperation  Candor  Caring  Casual  Challenge  Charity  Chastity  Clarity  Cheerfulness  Cleanliness  Cleverness  Collaboration  Commitment  Community  Compassion  Competence  Competitiveness  Composition  Consistent  Constancy  Contribution
Excitement  Leadership  Relaxation
Fairness  Learning  Reliability
Faith  Liberty  Resourcefulness
Fame  Listening  Resiliency
Family  Location  Respect
Fidelity  Love  Responsibility
Financial growth  Loyalty  Responsiveness
Financial security  Mindfulness  Righteousness
Flexibility  Moderation  Sacrifice
Fortitude  Mutual respect  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
Growth  Passion  Sincerity
Happiness  Patience  Sobriety
Health  Peace  Spirituality
Holiness  Perception  Stability
Honesty  Perseverance  Stamina
Honor  Persistence  Status
Hope  Personal Growth  Stewardship
Humility  Philanthropy  Strength
Humor  Power  Success
Independence  Practicality  Support
Industriousness  Pragmatism  Survival
Influence  Precision  Teachability
Informal  Professionalism  Teamwork
Ingenuity  Profitability  Thoughtfulness
Initiative  Prudence  Tolerance
Inner harmony  Prosperity  Tradition
Innovation  Purposefulness  Tranquility
Insightfulness  Prudencia  Transparency
Intelligence  Punctuality  Trust
Integrity  Quality  Trustworthiness
Intimacy  Reason  Truth
Joy  Receptivity  Understanding
Justice  Recognition  Uniqueness
Kindness  Reconciliation  Unity
Leadership  Relaxation  Self-control
Learning  Reliability  Self-esteem
Liberty  Resourcefulness  Self-sufficiency
Listening  Resiliency  Sensitivity
Location  Respect  Serenity
Love  Responsibility  Service
Loyalty  Responsiveness  Simplicity
Mindfulness  Righteousness  Sincerity
Moderation  Sacrifice  Sobriety
Mutual respect  Safety  Spirituality
Nature  Security  Stability
Naturalness  Self-control  Stamina
Obedience  Self-esteem  Status
Open communication  Self-sufficiency  Stewardship
Openness  Sensitivity  Strength
Opportunity  Serenity  Success
Order  Service  Support
Originality  Simplicity  Survival
Passion  Sincerity  Teachability
Patience  Sobriety  Teamwork
Peace  Spirituality  Thoughtfulness
Perception  Stability  Tolerance
Perseverance  Stamina  Tradition
Persistence  Status  Tranquility
Personal Growth  Stewardship  Transparency
Philanthropy  Strength  Trust
Power  Success  Trustworthiness
Practicality  Survival  Truth
Pragmatism  Teachability  Understanding
Precision  Teamwork  Uniqueness
Professionalism  Thoughtfulness  Unity
Profitability  Tolerance  Vitality
Prudence  Tradition  Vitality
Punctuality  Trust  Vitality
Quality  Trustworthiness  Vitality
Reason  Truth  Vitality
Receptivity  Understanding  Vitality
Recognition  Vitality  Vitality
Reconciliation  Vitality  Vitality
Relationships  Vitality  Vitality
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.