GUIDE

How to Discover Your Core Values

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7 Steps to Discover Your Personal Core Values

OVERVIEW: This guide provides detailed step-by-step instructions on how to discover your personal core values and to use personal values in meaningful ways.

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As a **personal coach**, I appreciate the power of values.

I've noticed that individuals experience greater fulfillment when they live by their values.

And when we don't honor our values, our mental, emotional, and physical state suffers.

I've seen this to be true in my life too.

What follows is a self-coaching tool to help you discover your personal core values.

Let's jump in …

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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 behavior, providing us with a personal code of conduct.

When we honor 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 behavior to uplift ourselves.

Knowing Your Personal Values Changes Your Behavior

I still remember going through my first values discovery process when I was 22.

I was attending an intensive 4-day seminar devoted to learning about what motivates people. Personal values were a central theme of the event.

One value that rose to the top of my list was health. Physical health, energy, and vitality were, and still are, important to me.

I spent much of my childhood with various illnesses, and I saw how it affected my development and life experiences in deleterious ways.

I committed to cultivating a strong foundation for my physical health and wellbeing in adulthood.

Clarifying this value as a top priority shifted many things in my young life. It influenced what I ate and drank. I now consumed different media and

installed different habits.

When you value health, you don't have to wrestle with managing impulse control as much.

If you know a particular food or activity isn't good for your body, you don't want it.

I made a practice of paying attention to how different foods made me feel after I ate them.

If something made me sleepy or drained my energy, I took note.

I sought to create a way of being that supported a healthy, energizing lifestyle.

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.

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 to 10 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 idealize 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.

For instruction on how to access a beginner's mind, **read this guide**.

For effective exercises to help you center yourself, **read this guide**.

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 are "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.

Here's 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 honoring then?

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 honor 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 50 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, candor, 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.

Are You Living Your Personal Values?

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

Assess how well you're honoring 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.

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

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

Discover the Core Values of Your Business

If you're a business leader or an entrepreneur, be sure to **discover your business core values** to create a thriving, unified culture.

Also, check out CEO Tony Hsieh's **Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose** to learn how he used core values to shape the culture at Zappos.com. The book is both instructive and entertaining.