



# How to lead a values-led life

If you're experiencing anxiety, stress or a general sense of dissatisfaction with the world, it might be time to realign your life in accordance with your core values

By Claire & Steve Chamberlain

**'If everyone led a values-led life, we would all still be infinitely unique in our individual expression, but the cumulative effect would be a more harmonious and joyful global environment'**

DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE LOST YOUR sense of direction in life? Perhaps you are suffering from a lack of purpose, or are constantly battling with free-floating anxiety or stress? Maybe you've realised you have taken a path in life that you just didn't envisage for yourself.

If any of this sounds familiar, you are certainly not the only one. There seems to be a collective search – "What do I want from this world?" But what if this question was turned dramatically on its head and, instead, we asked: "What is it this world wants from me?" Suddenly, it is about giving, not taking; it is about shining a light on your soul. It is about searching within yourself to discover what your true values are and what your real purpose is.

#### What are core values?

Quite simply, core values are what you value most in your life. The use of the term 'core' implies they run through the very centre of your being. They change little, if at all, over time, and help guide and shape your actions and experiences throughout your life. Core values can be conceptualised as a statement of who you are and therefore how you will choose to respond, regardless of

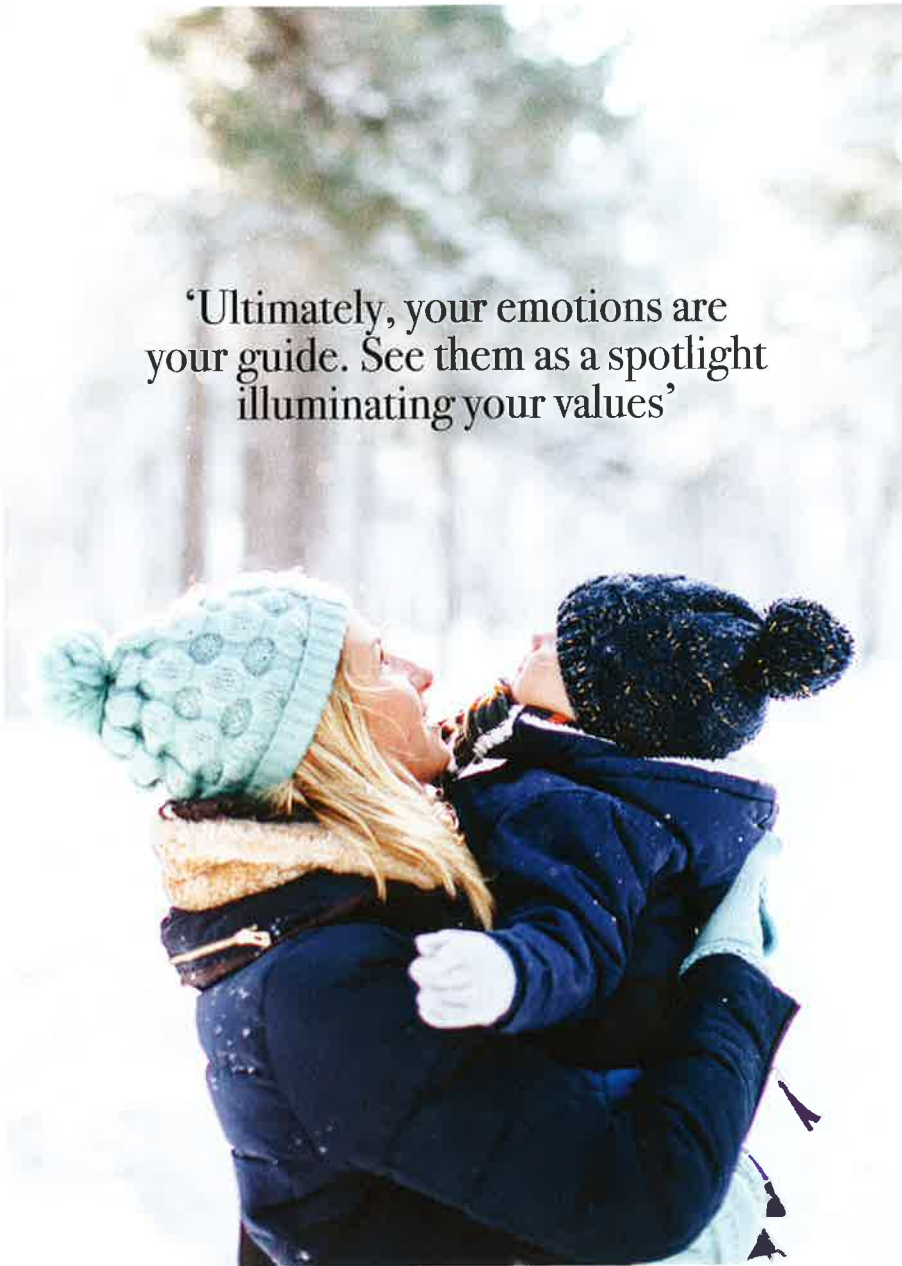
what challenges you face in the present moment. They are the blue print for how you choose to act in the world.

Fear, anxiety, guilt and other negative emotions can stem from not living in alignment with these core values. In fact, any time you are out of sync with your core values you will suffer. Whether this is felt as a background sense of unease, a sudden dose of guilt, or the paralysis of depression will depend upon the extent to which you have violated your innermost values in the actions you have taken. If, on the other hand, you experience feelings of flow, integrity, peace and joy, then you know that you are attuned to your values in the present. This holds regardless of whether you are dealing with a situation that is within your comfort zone or one that you find very challenging.

#### Discovery

If you're unsure what your innermost values are, how can you best uncover them? While there are books and resources on this subject that offer a comprehensive list of words from which you can select or prioritise your values, this can (and often will) lead you to select values you deem as the most desirable and to reject >

**'Ultimately, your emotions are your guide. See them as a spotlight illuminating your values'**



> any that our society deems as 'selfish'. As an example, many people would choose to include 'family' in their values list over 'wealth' or 'power'. However, for some individuals, being given the chance to take a high-powered job with a considerable pay rise that means they spend less time with their family is actually a values-based decision, and will therefore lead to a sense of integrity and joy. The knock-on effect of this could be that they make a significant contribution in their place of work and even impact positively on the quality time they do spend with their family. This same individual who has wealth and/or power within their

core values might actually experience frustration, anger and/or depression by turning down this opportunity, and therefore make less of a positive contribution both at work and at home.

Every individual is unique, as are their values, so choosing your values based on what you feel society dictates is most worthy might lead you to make choices that are not, in fact, at your core at all.

So how do you identify your core values? By shining a spotlight onto your life. When have you experienced feelings of integrity, peace, joy, love and flow? Look for the value you were fulfilling there.

When have you felt frustration,

resistance or helplessness? Look for the value you were violating.

For example, in the first instance, did your soul sing and your energy levels soar when you quit your office admin job at the age of 20 to go travelling? You'll likely have a value of 'adventure' or 'freedom' among your core values.

In the same way, did you slip into a feeling of lethargy and frustration while doing a repetitive job in a stifling albeit well-paid environment? Again, this could be a pointer to your value of 'adventure' being violated. You'll know when you've found a core value when there is a consistent pattern that you can identify over your life history and where strong emotions always play out. Ultimately, your emotions are your guide. See them as a spotlight illuminating your values, find the patterns and then narrow your list down to a small number (likely five or six core values) that you feel are largely unchanging and consistent over time.

### **Living in alignment with your values**

Once you have identified your five or six core values, it can be a good idea to write your list of values out, so you are clear on what's most important for you. These are the values you can then start to base all your life decisions upon. Once you have your list, start getting into the habit of asking the question, 'What action would best honour my values?' when a challenge or decision-point arises. The more you do this, the more your life will become a reflection of what you truly want it to be.

Until you are aware of your core values, and the role they play in how you experience your life, you are missing one of the key tools that it takes to create a joyful life. It's like trying to paint a masterpiece without being given the right paintbrush. Once you are aware, it is decision time. Do you choose to keep taking the same decisions and acting out the same patterns, some of which are in violation of your core principles and therefore inevitably lead to some form of suffering? Or, with your new awareness, do you now choose to make your decisions from a different starting point? Once you start to take values-based decisions consistently, you will experience more ease and joy in your life, even when significant challenges arise. Over time, you will naturally be drawn to a values-based life, but you can take control and choose to accelerate this process by making every decision a values-based one in the moment. >



interaction you have. If everyone led a values-led life, we would all still be infinitely unique in our individual expression, but the cumulative effect would be a more harmonious and joyful global environment.

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### Values and parenting

When you start leading a life that is closely aligned with your core values, it can have wide-ranging positive implications for your family. You will be leading a life filled with purpose, clarity and passion, creating a positive space for your children to grow in. But more than that, children thrive upon consistency, particularly from their parents and primary caregivers. Your children will come to know what you value, and will see that you are not willing to compromise upon these values at the will of others or to make short-term gains. You will earn their respect, and set an example for how life can be led. Your goal is not that your children should adopt your values, but that by witnessing a values-led life played out, they will come to know what they value most in their own lives.

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### Your time to shine

Leading a values-led life does not require a dramatic change, such as a new job, a house move or even relocation to a different country (although, of course, you could choose this). In fact, even small changes on a personal and local level could lead to a sense of greater wellbeing. For example, if one of your core values is ‘environment’, small, simple changes, such as ditching single-use plastics, walking or cycling instead of driving, and growing your own veg at home, can be hugely satisfying, rewarding and enriching.

Of course, the term ‘environment’ can be much broader than simply the flora and fauna of this planet. A values-led life – whatever your values may be – will ultimately lead to a more positive global environment, because by living in alignment with your values every day, you will be bringing integrity, flow and positive energy into everything you do and every

#### Define your core values:

- 1 Write your own eulogy.
  - How would you want the people close to you to describe your relationship?
  - What would you want people to say about your character and personal strengths?
  - What would you want people say you stood for in your life?
  - What would you want people to say about your achievements or the legacy you left behind?
- 2 Think of someone you admire or who inspires you.
  - Write down their unique qualities.

- Choose those qualities that you would like to bring to your own life.
- Write down the various roles you have in your life (father, son, brother, student, husband, wife, etc). Now, take the qualities that you’ve chosen from above and place them in front of your various roles (e.g. loyal friend).

#### Take steps to live out your core values:

- 3 Think about the domains in your life (work, family, school, health, community) and specify how the core values you’ve identified would look in these domains.

- 4 Describe a concrete action you can take today to embody your values.

- 5 What long-term actions can you take to bring you closer to living out these values? What are some barriers you have to living out your core values? Explore the thoughts and feelings that may be keeping you from committing to valued action.
  - *With thanks to Dr. Angela Williams, psychologist, specializing in cognitive-behavioral and humanistic/existential approaches to therapy. [rowancenterla.com](http://rowancenterla.com)*