

‘Core values are...called guiding principles because they form a solid core of who you are, what you believe, and who you are and want to be going forward.’

Susan M Heathfield

Your core values form the ‘compass’ that helps you decide how you want to live your life. If you are living and working in accordance with your values, you will feel energised and motivated; conversely if you are not living and working in line with your values, things will feel wrong. Therefore developing a career that will help you fulfil your values will help you in lots of ways.

In order to identify some of your values, think about the following questions:

- If you want an academic career, what are your reasons?
- If you are aiming for another kind of career, what are your reasons?
- What is important to you in your working life? In terms of

Financial reward

Status

Impact

Colleagues

Geography

Balance

Knowledge

What else?

- When do you feel you are operating at your best? What’s happening?
- When do you feel you are not performing well? What’s happening?
- What’s important to you in your personal life?
- When does it feel that everything is right with the world?
- When does it feel that everything is wrong with the world?

The important thing is to develop an awareness of your values and keep them in mind when you are thinking about how to shape your career. A few points to note:

You may need a sentence, or a paragraph, to articulate each value.

Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that the external world / other people should deliver on your values. Deliver on them for yourself.

Beware of adopting others’ – parents, teachers, bosses, colleagues – values and trying to live by them. Make sure you are working with your own.

Some of your values may conflict with each other and the skill lies in navigating your way through the conflict.

Values do change as you grow and develop, so don’t be afraid to let go of some and adopt new ones.

See also further information about values below.

Alison Trinder September 2020

Values

This handout is based on Whitworth, L. Kinsey House, K. Kinsey House, H. Sandahl, P (2009) Co-active coaching: new skills for coaching people towards success. London: Nicholas Brearley Publishing

Values have no moral sense attached to them – your values are what they are and there is no judgement attached.

Values are not principles: for example, setting a standard of behaviour in a workplace is a principle; everyone will (hopefully) comply but only some will experience a desire to ‘live’ that standard. So, if one of my values is ‘equality at work’, it is not my employer’s expectations with regard to equality that matter; what matters is the extent to which I am able to live my (working) life in accordance with my views on equality, which may or may not accord entirely with the standards set for behaviour at work.

We would all like our values to be honoured by others and the world in general, but we should not expect this to happen. Instead we should aim to behave in a way that honours our values for ourselves, and treat others in accordance with them. In this way we might tacitly invite others to do the same.

‘When we honour our values, we feel an internal ‘rightness’. It’s as if each value produces its own special tone. When we live our values, the various tones create a unique harmony. When we are not living our values, there is dissonance. The discord can get so extreme, so jarring, that it can become literally unhealthy.’ (Page 132)

Just as our physical features give us our unique appearance, the articulation, prioritisation, and clarity of our values determine our individual identity. Because values are unique to us, they can be difficult to articulate. Using a string of words can help us to understand what it is that we feel. For example, ‘freedom’ for me might equate with risk taking and adventure, while for you it might mean independence and choice. If you feel that you are out of kilter with your values, try articulating them using such a string of words.

Identifying your values

Values are intangible; they are not something that we do or have. If you desire something tangible, ask ‘what will having this do for me?’ ‘Money’ is a good example: as a resource it can enable you to honour values such as fun, creativity, peace of mind or security. Similarly, ‘travel’ is not a value; adventure and learning might be.

Many people find identifying their values difficult; they know only that their lives feel either harmonious or somehow out of kilter. Co-coaching with a partner can help. Ask your coaching partner open questions such as describing an aspect of her life by identifying what she enjoys or dislikes about it. Encourage her to put together strings of words that explain her feelings towards that aspect of life. How might she move towards the feelings of enjoyment and away from the feelings of dislike?

Don’t be tempted to ‘go shopping’ for values. Presented with a list of possible values many of us will alight on those that we think others will admire or judge ‘correct’. Spirituality and integrity may seem like ‘must have’ values; personal power and recognition may seem unworthy yet may be important personal values that should not be neglected.

There are no right or wrong values; there are only your values.

Adapted by Judith Secker and Alison Trinder (Revised 2020)