
Values & Life Purpose

Leaders exalt them, companies post them, parents transmit them, and our environment shapes them ... but what exactly are values? How do we represent our values? How do they influence our beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours? And above all, how can understanding our values help us create a life we want?

In short, your values define, who you are, what's important to you and how you relate to the world around you and how you interact with the people around you.

That's why values are such an important part of coaching.

We are happiest when we live in alignment with our values. They form the foundation of our life choices and actions. Without them, we risk living in a house without a foundation or a rocky one at best.

In coaching, we pay attention to a client's values as they relate to his or her goals. It's important that clients select goals, which align well with their values if they are to be successful.

Identifying Your Values

What do you value most in life?

What is the most important to you?

Our values underly everything we are, everything we do and everything we feel. They are our foundation. Become aware of values that may have been imposed on you by the society in which you live or your direct environment.

Look inwards to We need to look at our values to make sure they have not been imposed upon us from an outside source. To be successful you must be living your own values and not following someone else.

You can get a sense of your own values by asking yourself, "What are the values which you most honour in your life?" Answers might include honesty, fairness, success, kindness, etc. Some values may be easy to identify while others take some thought. Here are a few ways to further discover them:

1. Think of a recent incident, which made you very angry. The chances are that your anger arose from some violation of a value you hold. For example, if you were very angry because the restaurant staff served a well-dressed customer before you, even though you were there first, you might see that your anger arose because you value justice (first come, first served) but you may also feel there was a violation of your values around treating people equally and not based on appearance.

2. Think of something that makes you sad. Could be a film, a book or it could be something from real life. Sadness is another indicator that one of your values is being violated. What is it?

3. Write them down within 60 seconds without thinking too much. Then, when time's up, examine each one and see if you can find value in it. For example, if you wrote down "I am well liked", it might mean that you value sociability in people.

4. Use these starter sentences to help reveal other values. Again, use your gut rather than your intellect to complete endings perhaps more than one) for any of these kinds of a sentence:
 - People should ...
 - The trouble with society is ...
 - If I ruled the world...
 - It makes me so mad when ...
 - It fills my heart with joy when ...
 - I worship/despise because ...

5. The Values Game - This is an exercise that our students use to first understand themselves and their own values, and then use it with their own clients. You can find it in the resource section of this module.

What You Value Drives Your Choices

You know how if you're thinking of buying a certain type of car, you start to see that car everywhere. This happens in a part of your brain called the "Reticular Activating System" (RAS). When you load your new car into your conscious thinking, your RAS will note that you have an interest in it, and it will remain alert for relevant sensory data and make sure that your conscious mind is made aware of it. It will do this subconsciously - you will need no effort to make it work. That car was out there all along but your RAS wasn't programmed and so you never noticed them.

Now that you have examined your values, they will be in your RAS and they will start to trigger new awareness. Throughout your day, you'll see events unfolding and you'll see how these events relate to your values.

To leverage and prolong this effect, prioritise your values based on the impact you feel it has had on your life. Then arrange to have it "tap you on the shoulder" at regular intervals for a week or more. (You can use your mobile phone alarms, diary, Post It notes, etc.).

When we make decisions not based on our values, we either don't achieve the outcome we want or we feel intuitively not right about our choices. We may try to ignore or suppress this feeling. When we do this we are out of alignment with who we are. The very foundation of who we are starts to shake. We are now on the rocky ground and the energy around what we do is not strong and we feel very uncertain.

Your values can change over time. As you grow, your values will begin to grow as well.

Purpose

Knowing your life purpose can help you live your life on purpose - with focus and clarity. Your purpose gives you a clear direction for your life.

Imagine going from point A to B without any directions. You may turn left or right, go down several pathways to find they lead to nowhere, keep doing this for some time until eventually you find your way or you give up. You may take twice as long to get somewhere or never reached your destination at all.

Now imagine knowing exactly the direction you are heading in, you may at times feel a little unsure about the pathway but you check in with your purpose and wham! You are back on track again. Your focus is crystal clear and you get to your destination faster than you thought and you feel fantastic.

Identifying Your Purpose

You might want to begin by asking yourself what your purpose is in life.

If you're a bit stuck, here's a story about Bruce Lee that might help. A master martial artist asked Bruce to teach him everything Bruce knew about martial arts. Bruce held up two cups, both filled with liquid. "The first cup," said Bruce, "represents all of your knowledge about martial arts. The second cup represents all of my knowledge about martial arts. If you want to fill your cup with my knowledge, you must first empty your cup of your knowledge."

If you want to discover your true purpose in life, you must first empty your mind of all the false purposes you've been taught (including the idea that you may have no purpose at all).

So how to discover your purpose in life? You might create a mind map to understand your purpose beginning in the middle with the words 'my reason for living is.....'.

Here is exercise anyone can do. The more open you are to this process, and the more you expect it to work, the faster it will work for you. But not being open to it or having doubts

about it or thinking it's an entirely idiotic and meaningless waste of time won't prevent it from working as long as you stick with it — it will just take longer to converge.

Here's what to do:

1. Take out a blank sheet of paper or open up a word processor where you can type (I prefer the latter because it's faster).
2. Write at the top, "What is my true purpose in life?"
3. Write an answer (any answer) that pops into your head. It doesn't have to be a complete sentence. A short phrase is fine.
4. Repeat step 3 until you write the answer that makes you cry or vibrate or feel at peace. This is your purpose.

The false answers will come from your mind and your memories. But when the true answer finally arrives, it will feel like it's coming to you from a different source entirely.

Try to distil your purpose into two words if possible, a verb and a noun. Some examples of a purpose might be; inspiring beauty, supporting women, challenging thoughts, creating value, valuing time, living passionately, building frameworks and so on.

Share your purpose with trusted friends and colleagues and see how they respond.

Paragraph

Achieving Your Purpose

To achieve your purpose you need to write down some goals. If your purpose is inspiring beauty then your goals will reflect this. You might have goals like the design a range of products to inspire beauty. You might write a book or make a film. You can see that having a purpose around inspiring beauty can mean many things but you will know what it means for you since it will be created by your unique strengths.

Once you have your goals, list a range of actions needed to create the next steps. These actions need to be very measurable and specific. An example could be 'draw up three designs by a particular date'. The more specific then the easier they will be to achieve. You will have long and short-term goals.

Self-Application: Rules for Living Well

Determining your life purpose is one thing. Making it happen is another. Most people who have achieved great success in their lives will tell you that the success was not a result of a few major choices; it was the result of many, many small choices made every single day. If you look at an elite athlete, for example, their choice to join a league or swap teams, or to take up a scholarship, while important, will not figure in their success nearly as much as the choice to get out of bed and run around a cold running track, or do lap after lap in a swimming pool, day in, day out, year after year.

There are small choices that you can make every day that will take you closer to your dreams, or choices that you can make that will lead you further away. That's why your purpose is so important. It is the reason for living and must be used to determine which small choices to make.

Making challenging choices every day requires a few ground rules to support you along your journey. These rules we call 'The Rules for Living Well'. Once you have determined your purpose, then your Rules for Living Well will become obvious and while they may be similar to other people's they will be different in key ways and unique to your life journey.

The Dalai Llama might include spending several hours meditating each day. Steven Spielberg's might include watching movies by other director's every week. Your Rules for Living Well might include anything from eating vegetables every day to dancing to having a good, long laugh!

Any small steps that lead to your Purpose can be added to your rules. Try and create about 5 rules for living well that you can achieve each day. Keep a journal outlining every day if you have achieved them or not and don't forget to celebrate when you do.

Focus

So let's recap. To achieve your purpose in life you will have written down your values, designed your purpose, discussed it with some friends and colleagues, created some goals, designed some actions and written up your rules for living well to support you daily.

Each day you are checking in to make sure you are living by your rules or structures that support you in achieving your purpose. After having done all of this you will notice how your focus is totally different to before. Your purpose is before you every day, you are focused on it, you are achieving your goals, and you are sharing your purpose with others.

The energy around all of this activity is outward and forward. As you continue doing this you will notice how opportunities will come to that support your purpose. Your rules will ensure you are open to receiving and seeing these opportunities as they arise before you. Now the positive energy is spinning around you, in you, out of you and it is noticeable.

If you have followed the process honestly and deeply then trust your purpose and your values, which means trust yourself.

Reflection

1. Select three people you would like to share your values and purpose with. How will you ask them to support you in achieving your purpose?
2. Think of some role models that you have and look at what you value about them. Keep these role models close at hand so their lives enthuse yours when you need it.

3. What are your rules for living well?

Coaching Application

Some people will come to the coaching relationship with a clear vision for their life and a keen sense of their own personal values. Others will have spent some time reflecting on these but will find that coaching takes them to a deeper level and helps them to really clarify what they want out of life. Still, others will have spent very little time contemplating any bigger issues than their goals or challenges.

Clients can use coaching to achieve any goal and to change any behaviour. However, the goals that bring them closer to their purpose will be the most satisfying. When a coach and client work together on these things, coaching moves to a new level. Things that seemed impossible before suddenly become possible. Pathways become clearer and obstacles smaller.

As a coach ask your client to imagine if anything is possible, keep getting them to create a bigger picture for themselves. Discuss any limitations they may have and ask them to put these aside whilst doing this exercise. All limitations and fears can be worked through.

Often these fears disappear when a client realizes their purpose. Everything falls into place and they suddenly smile and feel relieved. You can hear them take a big breath like a sigh. This is a great sign. They are releasing any fear and feeling certain of their purpose and it is comforting them. It is vital that you enthuse your client into knowing their purpose when they are ready to go there. It will give them the clarity they need and the direction to move forward in to be highly successful and confident.

When you first start working with a client you may ask them to do this process first. If your client doesn't see this as relevant at the time then give them the space to move there when they are ready.

As a coach, know your purpose and how it relates to you as a coach. You may choose to

share your purpose with your clients in your marketing materials. It is pretty hard not to talk about it once you recognize your purpose as it is so exciting and it will create enormous amounts of energy in you.

Reflection

1. What is it about coaching that makes clients begin to reflect on their purpose?
2. Why are values so important to coaching?
3. Is there a relationship between values and happiness and if so what is it?
4. What is the relationship between behaviours and underlying values?

Resource

[3 Unexpected Ways to Find Your Life Purpose](#)

[The Values Game \(Word Doc\)](#)

[Design Your Life Program \(Word Doc\)](#)