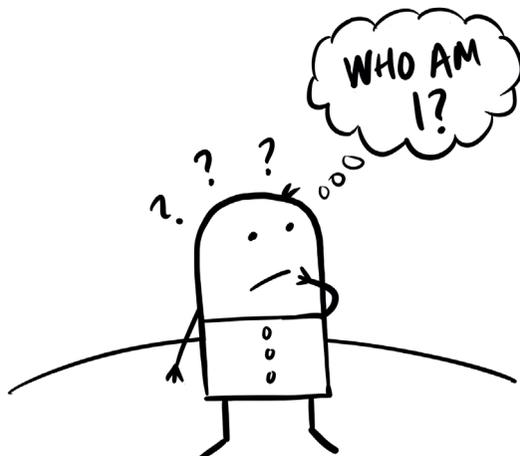


STAGE ONE

FINDING YOUR COMPASS

Values – who are you, *really*?



*'I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself,
not the life others expected of me.'*

The Top Five Regrets of the Dying, Bronnie Ware

*'Let go of who you think you're supposed to be;
embrace who you are.'*

Brené Brown

The first vital stage of any journey of note is preparation – making sure you have the map and tools by which to find your way. This is why we begin with values: who you are at the deepest level, and the foundation upon which everything else is built. If you know your core values – captured through words such as growth, drive, compassion or independence – you’ll have the compass by which to direct your journey. You’ll know which direction to head in, notice when you’ve strayed off track and understand how to course-correct. Your values are unique to you, and therefore the only instrument by which to guide your direction.

However, values are often misunderstood. We’re so used to individuals, companies, governments and even religions acting in ways that are completely out of alignment with their professed values, that we’ve lost faith in their relevance. How many of us have worked for companies whose practices are in direct contradiction to the values they emblazon on their walls, or seen politicians violating the values their party claims to represent? It’s therefore only natural that we’ve begun to question the relevance of values. We may feel they’re just words and have little concept of how they can help us lead a fulfilling life. But that’s precisely what they’re capable of doing.

What values are *not*

Let’s begin the process of identifying your values by first clearing up some common misconceptions.

Values aren’t words

Language, while remarkable, is at its deepest level imperfect, as a word can only ever be a pointer or a symbol for the subject at hand. For example, the word *mountain* is not a mountain; it’s a symbolic representation of a mountain. If you were to trek through a landscape made entirely of the word ‘mountain’, written thousands of times in different heights, fonts and colours, your experience would be fundamentally different to that of hiking through a real mountain range. To a toddler who hasn’t yet learned to read, this word is simply seen as eight meaningless squiggles on a page. A mountain is infinitely more complex than any one word or series of words can possibly portray.

The same goes for values. The word *integrity* is just a symbol. What it points to is infinitely more complex, rich and meaningful than words or images could possibly convey. How would you describe integrity in a sentence? How would you draw it? Would your representation ring true for everyone, or does integrity mean different things to different people?

Understanding your values, then, is not about simply picking desirable words, but rather choosing the symbol that most closely points to who you are at the deepest level.

Values aren’t positive attributes

It’s easy to assume that, when identifying your values, you should choose attributes or traits that you perceive as positive. This may lead you to choose value words such as *contribution*, *kindness* or *freedom* over *winning*, *security* or *control*, which can have more negative associations. However, you can drop all labels of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ here; in the world of values, *control* is no more or less positive than *contribution*; it’s simply a case of which is true for you.

To help illustrate, we may feel hesitant in selecting *winning* as a value. However, some of our most inspirational role models, including Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, embody this value in a positive way, thereby inspiring others to fulfil their own potential. This value can also be honoured within our family or work life by seeking out win-win solutions to challenges that arise.

Values aren’t a choice

You don’t choose your values. A common mistake when looking to identify values is to print out a list of value words and approach them as if selecting off an *à la carte* menu. This inevitably leads to bias, as we opt for words that we see as worthy or advantageous. However, we can no more pick our values than we can choose our height or eye colour. They point to who we already are in our essence, and what we hold dear, not who we wish ourselves to be.

Values aren’t priorities

Values are often discussed in much the same way we might talk about priorities, or what’s important to us at any given moment. ‘What do

you prioritise at this point in your life, and how might that change when you get older?’ could easily be substituted for ‘What do you value at this point in your life, and how might that change when you get older?’ This is perfectly valid, but it’s not how we’re using the word ‘value’ here. Values, as we’re talking about them, go far beyond priorities. We’re using the word to depict something much deeper. They’re the words or pointers that best describe what makes you unique. What is it, at a fundamental level, that sets you apart from your siblings, friends or peers?

What values are

Values are the words that best describe who you are and what matters to you most at the deepest level. Put simply, values – and more specifically, core values – point to who you are in your essence. The use of the term ‘core’ implies that they run through the very centre of your being. Your unique fingerprint of values is part of what makes you unique from every other human on the planet, despite sharing 99.9 per cent of the same DNA.² They determine what’s most important to you, what needs to be honoured and what you won’t accept, and therefore help to guide and shape your actions and experiences throughout your life. When you understand your values, you understand who you are at the deepest level and what choices will serve you. However, many of us are only partially aware of what our values are, and even fewer actively use them as a compass by which to guide our lives. Yet this is exactly what they are capable of doing.

Living without understanding your values is like beginning a journey without a compass. You won’t know which direction to head in and will likely find yourself beset by indecision at every turn. There’s little consistency to your choices, and a decision taking you in one direction today might be followed by a subsequent decision taking you in the opposite direction tomorrow. You could be left feeling overwhelmed and unable to move forwards. This is how many of us live our lives – but it doesn’t have to be that way. Knowing your values will provide you with the compass to guide your actions. There can be

² Based on DNA research led by Professor Marcus Feldman, Stanford University, 2002.

no more important step in creating a fulfilling life than to understand and align with your values.

A values-driven life

A values-driven life is defined by clarity and integrity. You have crystal clarity on who you are and what’s important to you. And you have the integrity that comes with aligning every action and decision with this awareness. A life aligned with your core values is defined by a sense of flow, where a dynamic, creative energy infuses every action, and life is experienced as an unfolding adventure in which you’re a co-creator.

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s much quoted line, ‘Life is a journey, not a destination,’ points to a values-driven life. The landmark you’re heading for is not a destination to arrive at, where all your toil and hard work is finally rewarded by an easy life. Rather, when aligned with your values, the journey towards your goal becomes intrinsically rewarding in and of itself. Toil and struggle is simply a sign that you’re off-track and need to course-correct. Once you reach your intended goal, you’re then compelled to continue on to new challenges over the horizon. Your values give you a direction of travel, not an end destination, and you begin to understand on a deep level that fulfilment is the result of experiencing, growing, evolving and exploring, rather than *arriving*. By continuously moving in the direction of your values, your life will become an outer representation of your inner values, and there will be a congruency to everything you do. A truly fulfilling life will always be values-driven, and a values-driven life will always be truly fulfilling.

The alternative

The alternative to a values-driven life is, sadly, the one that you might be more familiar with. You may experience a lack of clarity on who you are and what you’re here to achieve. You might feel a background sense of discontent, but are unsure why or how to course-correct. In many ways it feels like a rudderless life, where you ‘fall into’ jobs and end up playing roles that don’t serve you or those around you. You may find motivation a struggle and often procrastinate, or end up doing things

you feel you *should* be doing. Tragically, this can often lead to you believing there's something wrong with *you*.

You may also typically struggle to make decisions, particularly the major ones in your life:

'What should I do in this situation?'

'Which job offer should I accept?'

'Is this a relationship I really want to invest in?'

These are the kind of broad questions you might ask yourself when you don't know your values. And the answers you will get from such imprecise questions will be predictably vague:

'Maybe I should do this? Or I could do that? I don't know.'

'This career is more financially rewarding, but the other would give me more time with my family; I'm not sure which is the best option.'

'I do like them, but we're starting to argue a bit. Maybe I should cut my losses now... but what if this is a pattern I need to break?'

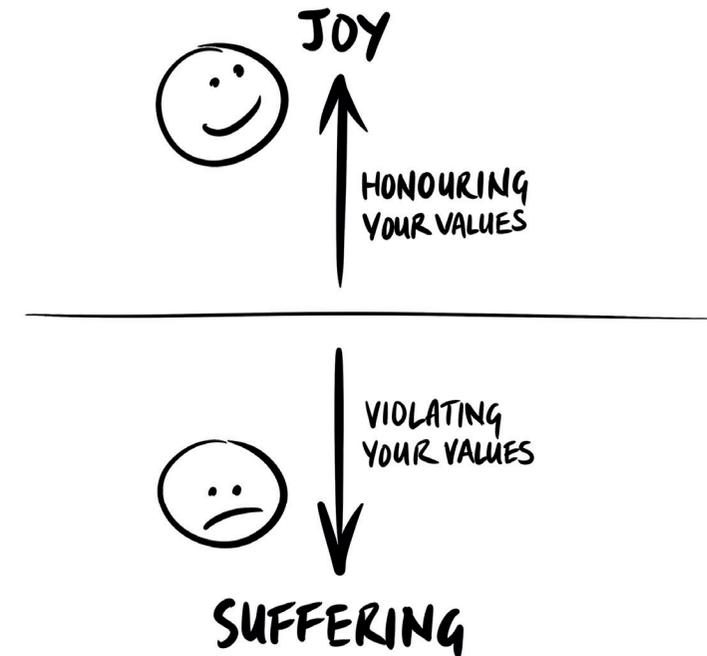
This type of circular thinking can play out endlessly if you don't know your values.

A key realisation here is that your mind is an incredible tool for storing and retrieving information, but *not* for making decisions (something we'll come to when we explore mindset). Without knowing your values, you have nothing reliable by which to guide your choices or your direction of travel.

Being unaware of your values can also leave you open to fear, anxiety, guilt and a range of other unhealthy emotions, because any time you're out of sync with them, you will suffer. Whether this is felt as a background sense of unease, a sudden dose of guilt, or the paralysis of depression depends upon the extent to which your actions have compromised your values. For example, it's likely in the past you've experienced taking an action that you instantly regretted – one that left you with a heavy feeling in your stomach and had you wishing you could go back and make a different choice. To experience this, you can be sure you've violated a core value. In addition, the low-level dissatisfaction many of us experience in life also has its roots in values. For example, if you value *creativity*, you'll suffer if given a work project that involves endless detail and spreadsheets; if you value *control*, you'll

suffer when a project has lots of moving parts that you can't directly influence; and if you value *growth*, you'll suffer in roles where there's no opportunity to develop or progress.

The values principle



Suffering follows the violation of your values *every time*, and the level of suffering you experience is determined by the extent to which you're out of alignment. This unerring consistency points to what I call the *Values Principle* which, like all laws of nature, plays out without exception. This is a key realisation as you look to create a fulfilling life. It also means that, while unpleasant, suffering serves an important purpose.

If you were asked, 'Do you want to suffer?' your answer would naturally be: 'No.' This natural response may lead you to think of suffering as a form of adversary that must be avoided or overcome. However, what if suffering served a purpose, providing valuable information to help guide your journey? If that were true, then rather

than turning your back or doing battle, you might choose to accept your present suffering and ask, ‘What is the lesson here?’ or ‘Where have I lost my way?’ Instead, we typically close ourselves off to our suffering by denying it, perhaps by drinking or medicating ourselves to numb the pain, or maybe by losing ourselves in escapes, such as box sets or gaming. But avoiding your suffering stops you from realising which value you’ve compromised, and therefore how you can course-correct going forwards.

While nobody wants to suffer, the *Values Principle* determines that much unnecessary suffering will drop away as soon as you realign your life around your core values³. This principle, therefore, is one of the keys to your freedom from suffering.

³ Holding limiting beliefs, and resisting reality are two other key sources of unnecessary suffering; areas we’ll address later in our journey, when we come to beliefs and mindfulness.



When I violated my core values

At 28, I quit my job as the Events Director of a leading London events company, to get away from the stress and anxiety I perceived this role to be causing me. At the time I didn’t know what values were, let alone my unique core values or the extent to which I would suffer if I compromised them. I was about to learn the hard way! Unbeknown to me, by stepping away from a challenging yet inspiring career, I had just violated my core value of *growth* – and the suffering arrived instantly.

I remember meeting my dad for a walk around Hampstead Heath a few days after handing in my notice. My world had changed, but not in the way I’d hoped. Prior to handing in my

notice, I was convinced the weight of the world would drop from my shoulders, and I’d feel happy and free; this turned out to be far from reality. Within a few short days I looked and felt like a broken person. My body language had perceptibly changed, I felt lethargic and walked with my head down. I muttered abrupt responses to my dad’s questions and felt a strange sense of disconnection from the world. I had a heavy feeling in my gut – a sense I’d violated something important and made a terrible mistake, but felt powerless to do anything about it. I didn’t know it at the time, but my actions had brought about the onset of depression.

Rather than finding myself magically gifted a dream job that would solve all my problems (a fantasy that I can now look back on with the humour that comes with perspective!), I instead began applying for jobs I wanted less than the one I’d just left, in order to pay the bills. And so I found myself in a job interview for a charity, lying about my selfless decision to leave the corporate world in order to work for their cause. I was now unconsciously violating my number one core value of *integrity*, and the suffering cranked up to a whole new level. I accepted the subsequent job offer and began a period of my career where I suffered daily with anxiety, alongside periodic bouts of depression and suicidal thoughts. I was out of integrity in my career, and I wouldn’t move beyond my suffering until that changed; a process that would take me several years.

The suffering (anxiety and depression) I experienced can be compared to the pain that results from touching a hot stove. While I would never have chosen this pain, it served a vital purpose, telling me in no uncertain terms not to repeat this action again. It was through this experience that I came to know my core values of *integrity*, *growth*, *family*, *meaning* and *excellence*, which later compelled me to take the leap

of setting up my own coaching practice, despite having a mortgage, two young children and only a small amount of savings. I knew on a deep level that suffering had served its purpose: it had shown me powerfully where I was off track so I could take a different path. I now look back on this experience as a vital part of my personal journey, which has allowed me to create a genuinely fulfilling life, and enabled me to help others to do the same. I personally wouldn't change a thing, but this suffering is avoidable if you can learn to understand and honour your values.

How to identify your values

If you're unsure what your values are, how can you best uncover them? Many people start with a list of values words, but this can (and often will) lead you to select values you deem as desirable, and to reject any you perceive as less worthy. As we learned earlier, values exist beyond the poles of 'good' and 'bad', so you're aiming to uncover what or who you *already are* in your essence, rather than values you admire.

So, how do you identify your core values? By shining a spotlight onto your life. When have you experienced profound feelings of joy, contentment, fulfilment and flow? Look for the value you were fulfilling there. When have you felt angry, discontented, unfulfilled or stuck? Look for the value you were violating. For example, did you experience a sense of joy and a burst of positive energy when you quit your office admin job at the age of 20 to go travelling? If so, *adventure* or *freedom* may be among your core values. On the flip side of the same example, did you experience lethargy and frustration when you stayed in a repetitive full-time job? Again, this may point to values of *adventure* or *freedom*, but this time through compromising, rather than honouring, these values. You know you've found a core value when it has played out many times over the course of your lifetime, always with strong associated emotions. Let's begin the process of uncovering your values...

Four steps to uncovering your core values

Finding your values is like playing detective. The clues will all be there, as you will have brought your values into every interaction, job, relationship and situation you've ever been in. They're inseparable from who you are, and have therefore already played out, whether you've been conscious of them or not: now it's about bringing them to the surface. There are four key steps you'll follow to do so: *FEEL* (*Finding* your long-list of values; *Establishing* which of these are your core values; *Explaining* what they mean to you; and *Listing* them by order of priority). Your feelings will be your guide.

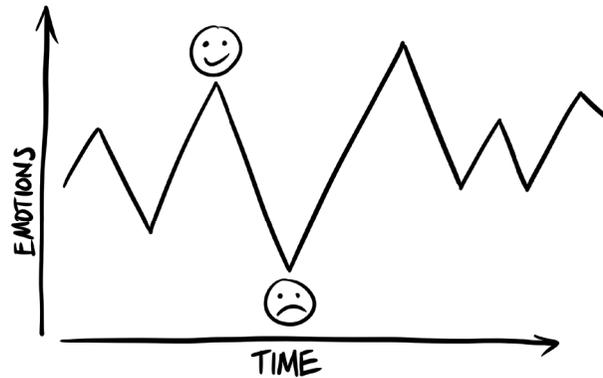


Uncovering your values

Step one: find your long-list of potential values

Your first step is to identify a long-list of values that you feel are potentially important to you. As explained earlier, rather than looking for priorities, which naturally ebb and flow over time, you're looking for your deepest values, which are timeless. You'll know if something is a possible core value if it plays out in all areas of your life and is consistent from a young age right through until the present day. For example, if you value *justice*, then times when you felt there was an injustice at school will have affected you much more strongly than your peers, and this will still play out for you in your workplace today. You'll also likely be strongly affected by instances of injustice in your relationships, as well as in wider society.

Let's begin the process of building your long-list, by creating a timeline of your peak and trough moments:



- a. Take a blank sheet of paper and, starting from your earliest memories to the left of the page and then moving to the right towards the present day, mark any key peak and trough experiences that stand out in your life. For the peaks, you're looking for times when you experienced great flow, energy, peace or joy; those for which you have a vivid positive memory, as if your mind took a snapshot. Some of these might be significant life events, such as passing your driving test, securing a job promotion or getting married. Others could be less obvious events that hold real meaning for you, such as a particular family gathering, a moment on a holiday or a time you thrived at work. For the troughs, you're looking for times where you suffered, experienced toxic emotions such as anger, or felt a strong sense of disconnection. Some of these might be significant life events, such as failing an exam, a long-term relationship break-up or being made redundant. Others could be less obvious, such as a point in your career when your energy and motivation hit rock bottom, a time when a friend's actions triggered you, or any other experience that still brings up strong negative emotions. The only exception here is an event where you would expect anyone to suffer, such as the death of a loved one, where a core value may not be at play. Continue this

process until you've captured all the key high and low points from your life.

- b. When your timeline is complete, take each of the peak experiences one at a time. Tune fully into the memory and associated emotions, and consider the following questions:
 - What was the key factor that created the sense of joy, contentment, fulfilment or flow? (For example, if a holiday where you experienced peak states while taking part in a series of adrenaline-fuelled activities came to mind, you may value *courage*, *excitement* or *achievement*.)
 - If you could take one thing from that situation and bring it into the rest of your life, to help you experience these peak states more often, what would it be? (For example, if an evening came to mind where you and a couple of close friends had time to connect on a deep level, *connection*, *love* or *friendship* might be your value.)
- c. Repeat this process for each of the peak memories in your life, adding all the potential value words you've identified to your long-list.
- d. Next, consider your trough experiences. Again, taking one at a time, tune fully into the memory and associated emotions, and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What was the key factor that created the suffering? (For example, was it that you, or someone else, lied? In which case the value could be *honesty*, *truth* or *integrity*.)
 - If you could have changed one thing about the situation, which would have taken away the suffering, what would that be? (For example, if you wish you'd stepped up and taken the lead, rather than staying in the background, *leadership* or *drive* could be a value.)

- e. Repeat this process until you have a long-list of potential values, likely to be somewhere between 15 and 30, but fewer or more is absolutely fine. You may find that some of the words are similar to others on your list, which is to be expected at this stage.

Step two: Establish your core values

We've deliberately avoided referring to a values list until this point, to ensure you uncover your authentic values. However, this is the perfect time to scan and see if any additional value words resonate for you and should be included in your long-list. You can download a sample values list for free at stevechamberlain.co.uk/livingonpurpose.

Now it's time to find which of the value words on your long-list are your *core* values:

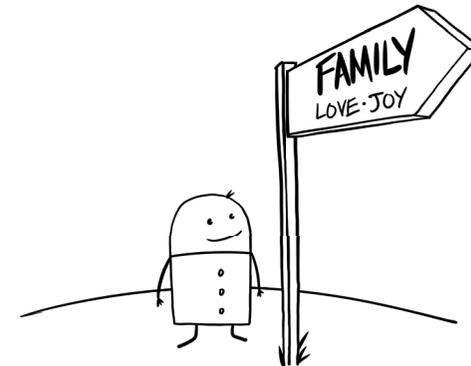
- a. First, take your long-list and read each word in turn. Any words that no longer resonate for you can be removed from the list, by striking a line through them. This isn't to say that these secondary values are no longer important and should be ignored, but they're not the biggest players for you and therefore won't be the best ones to steer your major life decisions by.
- b. Now go through your list again, this time looking for the value words that resonate most strongly for you. Star those you feel point to something that has always been important to you and always will be. Your goal is to get a short-list of four to seven value words⁴ that are the big players for you, but initially you may find yourself starring ten or more words, which is a natural part of this process.

⁴ This isn't prescriptive, but tends to be the optimal number. Any fewer and you may not have sufficient self-knowledge to guide your decisions. Any more, and you may find the clarity that comes from knowing your core values is diluted.

- c. Now consider whether any of the values are interrelated. For example, if you've starred both *peace* and *calmness* are these two separate values, or do they form part of the same picture for you? If they are related, which word resonates most strongly for you? Keep the star for this one and delete from the other. If you still have more than seven values starred after this process, read your short-list again and ask yourself which values aren't quite as important to you as the others. You can then remove these stars. Repeat this process until you have four to seven core values identified.
- d. Leave any remaining words that haven't been starred or crossed out. These will come into play in the next step.

Step three: Explain what each value means to you

This step gives you a deeper understanding of your core values. This is important, because the same word points to something different for everyone. For example, the value *charity* may conjure images of working on the front-line in a war-torn conflict zone for some, while for others it brings to mind offering help and support to those in the local community. Both are equally valid, but understanding what your values represent for *you* will help ensure you steer your course correctly. This is done by attributing two additional words to each of your core values.



Imagine the core value word – in the above example *charity* – as being engraved on a signpost⁵ a few yards in front of you. Your goal is to find two associated words that laser the direction of the signpost directly at *you*. For example, the person who views *charity* within a frontline context may add the two associated value words *commitment* and *courage*, so their signpost reads *CHARITY | commitment | courage*. Alternatively, the person who views *charity* within a more local setting may have *CHARITY | community | contribution*. This distinction will lead to very different life choices.

Let's do this process for your core values now:

- a. Start by writing out your core values – those still starred from the previous exercise – on a blank sheet of paper.
- b. Now come back to any remaining value words from your original list that weren't crossed out. Take each word at a time and consider whether it might form part of one of your core values. For example, *achievement* and *performance* may come together with a core value of *excellence*, while *wisdom* and *spirituality* may come together with *meaning*.
- c. Finally, review your latest values list to make sure that each core value has the word that most resonates first, and then two associated words that define what that value means to you (for example, TRUST / *integrity* / *honesty*).

Step four: List your values in order of priority

This final step may seem a strange one. Surely knowing your core values is enough? Why the need to order them? The answer lies in the complexity of our lives. There will be many instances where you can't honour all of your values equally,

⁵ I was introduced to this tool by a colleague a number of years back, and have included here as my clients find this invaluable.

resulting in a natural tension between them. For example, you may have a core value of *freedom* and another of *connection*. You're at a crossroads in your career, and the opportunity to work for yourself arises. This possibility excites you, but you also know that in doing so you'll no longer work as part of a team. Your decision may depend on whether *freedom* or *connection* is higher on your list. Again, there is no right or wrong decision as determined by some external judgement, but rather an internal sense of knowing what is right for you, given your core values.

Let's order your values:

- a. To begin, simply see if you find it an easy process to order your values from one (as your most important value), and then sequentially down.
- b. If you feel unclear on how to order your core values, look back over your life and search for patterns that have played out. Which values have tended to be the biggest players for you? Which have led to the strongest positive or negative emotions when you have honoured, compromised or violated them? Which value has always been front of mind when you've had to take big decisions?
- c. If you're still unclear, project forwards by asking which of your core values would be most important to you in shaping a major upcoming life decision, such as a new career or house move.

When you've finished ordering your values, add them to the Purpose Primer, which can be downloaded for free at stevechamberlain.co.uk/livingonpurpose. We'll come back to this on the next stage of our journey.



Client case study – Anastasia

Anastasia was exhausted, demotivated and on the verge of a breakdown when we began working together. She was working eighty-hour weeks, including evenings and weekends, and was often in tears as she talked about how little time she spent with her daughter, who was just six at the time. She knew her life was out of alignment, but had no idea how to course-correct. To help her do so, we uncovered and ordered her values, which were: 1. *Transparency*; 2. *Family*; 3. *Freedom*; 4. *Success*; 5. *Evolution*. Through this process, Anastasia had a key insight: she had chased *success* above all else, just as her father had while she was growing up, but she now realised that this value had always been less important to her than *transparency*, *family* and *freedom*. Success may have been her father's number one value, but it wasn't hers. Now, with a daughter of her own, tirelessly chasing success at work meant violating her more important value of *family*, resulting in the stress she had been experiencing.

Anastasia also realised that an organisation she sourced some of her work from was violating her number one value of *transparency* by deliberately misleading clients, which had been a source of internal conflict for her. Anastasia therefore chose to step back from this work. The moment she took this decision, a weight lifted off her shoulders. She had agonised over this situation for months, but now that she could make a clear, values-led decision, it was easy to act. This choice freed up significant time for her family and gave her the freedom to take on work with more values-aligned companies.

Anastasia's final insight was that she had always assumed success was limited to the workplace but, at this moment in time, helping to create a loving family environment was a key part of what success meant to her. This enabled her to find an optimal work/life balance, while still honouring this value.

When we spoke again a couple of months after implementing these changes, Anastasia was glowing, talking proudly about the work projects she'd been able to take on, and the time she had carved out for her husband and daughter. Knowing the order of her values had given her the clarity by which to course-correct.

Simply being conscious of your values will have a significant positive impact in your life. You'll start to understand why you enjoy what you enjoy, which situations you need to avoid, and how you can cultivate more positive experiences and emotions. But that's just the beginning...

How to live according to your values

Now you're conscious of your core values, you'll likely find yourself naturally drawn to honouring them in your life, but you can take control of, and accelerate, this process by consciously using your values to guide *every* decision you take. For example, you can get into the habit of asking, 'What action here would best honour my value of [insert core value]?' The more you do this, the more your life will become a reflection of who you are and what you stand for.



Realigning your life around your values

Step one: Find where you're currently out of alignment with your values

The first step is to ask where your energy levels are low, and where you are currently struggling or suffering in your life. For example, you may find a particular relationship, work project or role draining. Jot down each specific situation that comes to mind in the table below. Next, look at your core values list and identify which value(s) you're currently out of alignment with in each of the situations. For example, is your marriage lacking *fairness* because you feel the relationship is unbalanced? Is a work project making you feel disconnected, because it involves you working alone rather than in *collaboration*? Or is the job itself no longer honouring your core value of *growth*, because there are no development or promotion opportunities?

Challenging situation	Value(s) being compromised

You'll know your list is complete when you can confidently say that, if all those areas were resolved, your life would be defined by energy and flow.

Step two: Determine how to realign

Now use the tool below to explore how you could realign each situation with your core values. For example, in your marriage, you may decide that you could honour *fairness* by 1) speaking to your partner about how you're feeling; 2) offering some possible solutions on how to bring the relationship back into balance; or 3) drawing up a personal weekly planner that includes activities you know will re-energise you.

- Challenging situation:
- Core value(s) it's out of alignment with:
- What three steps could you take to realign this situation with your values?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- Of the options identified, which aligns most closely with your core values?
- If you took this course of action, would it sit well with you, regardless of outcome?
- Do you choose to take this course of action? If *yes*, move to step three. If *no*, repeat this process until you find a values-aligned course of action you're happy to take.

Step three: Create an action plan

Now you've chosen your course of action, it's time to make that your reality. The key to this step is considering when, where and how to take action, to achieve the best possible outcome. For example, raising your relationship concerns with your partner when you're both tired, without preparing what you plan to say, is unlikely to set you up for success. Instead, choosing a time when you're both refreshed will likely play out much better. You'll also find that focusing on concrete examples ("When you texted me to say you were staying out with your work friends, it meant I had to rearrange my plans and I felt really frustrated") rather than subjective sweeping statements ("You keep on messing me around") will help. The steps below can be used to map this out.

- What is my desired outcome?
- When and where do I choose to take action?
- What preparation can I do to help ensure the best outcome for all?

How to use your values to make decisions

Values-led choices take you *precisely* where you want to go, saving you the lost time and suffering that results from straying off-track. Now you are conscious of your values, you're able to use them to ask higher-quality questions to determine your ideal path.

**Client case study – Clare**

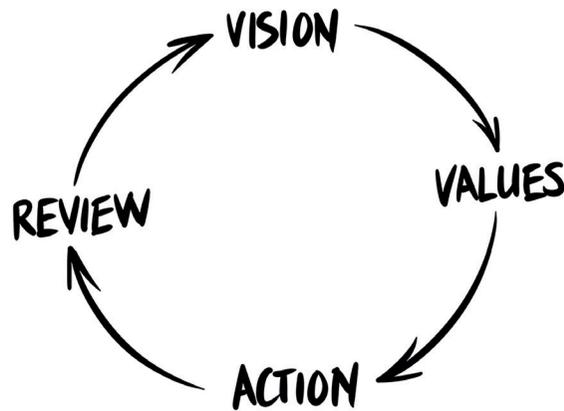
Clare was a Director of two thriving companies, a loving wife and mother to two young children. When we began working together, she was experiencing overload, pulled between different work projects and unable to carve out quality time with her family. She had no clear criteria by which to decide which opportunities to take on, and didn't feel able to say no, for fear of letting people down and experiencing the resulting guilt.

We identified Clare's values – 1. *Love*; 2. *Approval*; 3. *Responsibility*; 4. *Efficiency*; and 5. *Security* – and then viewed her current situation through this lens. She realised only certain projects fulfilled her top three core values, and that those she didn't *love*, have the opportunity to take full *responsibility* for, or receive *approval* from an end beneficiary for, could easily be delegated to others. She had previously assumed *security* was her highest priority and had equated this with taking on every project, for fear the jobs or money might run out. However, realising this was leading her to feel overwhelmed, she was free to prioritise her top core values when taking future decisions.

In our next session together, Clare was buzzing, saying that for the first time, she had been able to make a clear choice between work projects based upon her values, and was then able to communicate which ones she was no longer able to take on. Others within the company then benefited, by being given opportunities that wouldn't have otherwise come their

way. I saw Clare again some months later and she now only works on values-aligned projects, has a bigger impact within her companies and experiences no guilt when turning down opportunities that don't align with her values.

Here are the four steps to taking values-based decisions:



Step one – envision your ideal outcome

The first step is to know where you are headed. The following questions will serve you when you reach a decision point:

- Knowing my core values are [insert core values], what is my ideal outcome?
- What would be the best possible outcome for all involved?
- If *anything* was possible, what would I love to achieve here?

For example, imagine you're feeling demotivated in your current job, having worked in the same position for the past five years. When you started at the company, you loved coming to work, but now you're watching the clock each day. Your core values, in order of importance, are **growth**, **leadership**, **success**, **integrity** and **family**. The above questions might lead you to identify the following goal:

'To step up to my first management position, build a team that I'm proud of, increase my salary and begin to look forward to work again.'

Step two – come back to your values

Use your values to decide on the best course of action. The following questions can be used to guide this process:

- How can I best honour my core values of [insert core values] to achieve my desired outcome?
- Which are my top three core values, and how can I align with them here?
- Does this approach sit well with me? (Tune into your body here to gauge whether your chosen action is truly values aligned. You'll feel it in your gut if it's not quite right, in which case revisit the questions above).

Continuing our earlier example, these questions might lead to the following insights and plan of action:

'**Growth**, **leadership** and **success** are my top core values, so I can see why this period of my career has been so challenging. I've been coming home miserable for the past year, and realigning around these values will help me be my old self again for my loved ones (**family**). However, the same value also means that I don't want to end up in a role that requires me to work evenings or weekends.'

'I believe in the goals my team is trying to achieve (**integrity**), so I'm keen to explore how I might be able to step up to a management role within my company. I get on well with my manager, so trust that having an open and honest conversation with her is the best approach (**integrity**). I am confident I could add significant value by leading a development team in our area of the business (**success**). Therefore, in preparation for speaking with my manager, I will create a business case outlining the key benefits.'

'If, on the back of our conversation, it's clear there are no opportunities to step up within my current area, I'll ask to explore opportunities to take on a secondment to a management role (**leadership**) elsewhere within the business, and line management training (**growth**).'

'If there are no opportunities for me to develop within the next 12 months, then I'll choose to explore opportunities elsewhere. In that instance, I will still give my best for the remainder of my time here (**integrity**) and will search for companies and roles that align with my values.'

Step three – take action

Make it happen. If now is the optimal time, do it. If not, diarise it. If you need to put in some preparation time, get started. In the above example, this would mean setting aside time to create a business case, as well as preparing for the meeting. By making commitments and sticking to them in this way, your life will inevitably become an outer reflection of your values.

Step four – review and course-correct

After the event, you can reflect on whether you achieved the desired outcome and honoured your values as planned. If not, this is valuable information. Instead of beating yourself up, use this as a learning experience. The below questions can support this process:

- What lessons have I learned?
- What would I do differently next time, given the information I now have?
- What have I learned about my values and how I can best honour them moving forwards?

Bringing it all together

It's important to understand that knowing your values doesn't take away the complexity or challenge of life. However, on a deep level, you'll become clear on who you are, what you stand for and what needs to be done. By anchoring your actions to your values, there will be an integrity and consistency to your choices that, over time, will transform your life.

Understanding your values also gives you the compass by which to find the unique contribution you're here to make. Which leads us to the next stage on our journey: purpose.

Reflection

- Where are you currently suffering in your life? Which core value(s) are you out of alignment with?
- What simple steps could you take to realign with your values, thereby regaining direction and balance?
- What's your key insight from this stage of your journey, and what will you do differently as a result?