

## Defining Your Values

When you define your values, you discover what's truly important to you. A good way to start is to look back on your life – identify when you felt really good and really confident that you were making good choices. Your values will help you determine your priorities. When your values and your priorities are in line with each other, life can be much easier. For example, if you value family but have to work 60 hours a week, you may feel internal conflict.

**Step 1: Identify the times when you were happiest. Find examples from both your career and personal life. This dual examination will ensure some balance in your answers.**

What were you doing?

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Were you with other people? If so, who were you with?

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What other factors contributed to your happiness?

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**Step 2: Identify the times when you were most proud. Use examples from your career and personal life.**

Why were you proud?

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Did other people share your pride? Who?

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What other factors contributed to your feelings of pride?

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**Step 3: Identify the times when you were most fulfilled and satisfied. Again, use both work and personal examples.**

What need or desire was fulfilled?

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How and why did the experience give your life meaning?

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What other factors contributed to your feelings of fulfillment?

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#### **Step 4: Determine your top values, based on your experiences of happiness, pride, and fulfillment**

Why is each experience truly important and memorable? Use the list here

[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_85.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm) of common personal values to help you get started – and aim for about 10 top values. (As you work through, you may find that some of these naturally combine. For instance, if you value philanthropy, community, and generosity, you might say that service to others is one of your top values.)

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#### **Step 5: Prioritize your top values**

This step is probably the most difficult, because you'll have to look deep inside yourself. It's also the most important step since you'll have to choose between solutions that may satisfy different values. This step will help you determine which value is more important to you.

- Write down your top values, not in any particular order.
  - Look at the first two values and ask yourself, "If I could satisfy only one of these, which would I choose?" It might help to visualize a situation in which you would have to make that choice. For example, if you compare the values of service and stability, imagine that you must decide whether to sell your house and move to another country to do valuable foreign aid work, or keep your house and volunteer to do charity work closer to home.
  - Keep working through the list, by comparing each value with each other value, until your list is in the correct order.
  - Feel free to use a separate sheet of paper.
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#### **Step 6: Reaffirm your values**

Check your top-priority values, and make sure they fit with your life and your vision for yourself.

- Do these values make you feel good about yourself?
  - Are you proud of your top three values?
  - Would you be comfortable and proud to tell your values to people you respect and admire?
  - Do these values represent things you would support, even if your choice isn't popular, and it puts you in the minority?
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When you consider your values in decision making, you can be sure to keep your sense of integrity, and approach decisions with confidence and clarity. You'll also know that what you're doing is best for your current and future happiness and satisfaction. Making value-based choices may not always be easy; however, it should serve you best in the long run.