



# How Your Values Shape a Life of Meaning and Impact

*"Values are your guide to life - if you know what they are."*

~ Gustavo Razzetti

Most people don't know what they don't know, me included. We all believe we know more (about ourselves) than we actually do. This point is not meant to make you feel bad, rather invite you to reflect on your *values*. Even if you're clear on what you stand for, read on.

## **What are values?**

Your values are like an internal operating system; they are your central beliefs that guide your thoughts and actions, whether you realize it or not. These principles influence your behaviour and personality traits, guide you through success and challenging times, inform your decisions, and impact your relationships.

That thing that drives you crazy? It's very likely tied to your values. Think about it. We don't get upset about things that don't matter to us. If something gets you riled up, it's likely because something about it matters to you.

One of the best and most fun ways to identify your values is to start paying attention to what pisses you off - the things that push your buttons or cause you to twitch. As you go about your days, notice what gets you riled up. You don't have to change anything, just notice your feelings and get curious about them.

## **Ready to dig in?**

This exploration into values isn't a quick one. To do it right takes time, space, and percolation. Like a perfectly brewed cup of coffee, time and patience make it completely worth it.

I'll encourage you to slow down to clarify what matters to you at your core. I'll help you plan to live and lead through your values more authentically and find the words to communicate your values to others for the sake of less frustration and more collaboration with those you work with, lead, and love.

## CARD SORT EXERCISE

If you have a Big Change Value Cards deck, this is the time to open them up!

*No deck? No problem. Instead of sorting the cards, you can use the Big Change List of Values on the last page of this workbook. You can even create your own index cards for a tactile experience.* There's something magical about the tangible feeling of holding the cards in your hands. As you read each card, start to sort them into three categories as a first step.

- Yes - this is a value
- Maybe - this might be a value
- No - this isn't a value

There's no right or wrong here; simply consider each word and notice your response to that word (What is your head saying? What's your body language saying?).

A few tips:

- Don't overthink it. Listen to your intuition.
- Be aware of values you think you *should* choose - things like integrity and honesty. You can value honesty without it being a value that drives your behaviour.
- Think about the things that drive you CRAZY. What's underneath your pissed-off-ed-ness? It is likely a value being stomped on, ignored, and is currently unknown to you and/or others. Remember, we don't get upset about things that don't matter.
- Consider your interpretation of the word; what is *your* experience with it? The word's dictionary definition doesn't matter here - it's what it means to you.

If you have a lot of cards in the 'Yes' pile, go through them another time or two; further sort and filter until you have a list that feels right (for now).

Lay out the 'Yes' pile in front of you so you can see them all. Are there any you can combine because they feel similar? Perhaps *truth* and *honesty* or *creativity* and *beauty*. Is there a word that captures the essence of what this means for you? Are there any you're willing to discard? Remember, the dictionary definition of the words doesn't matter here - it's what they mean for *you*.



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When I first did the card sort, I chose *fun* and *play*. While they somewhat captured the value I was looking for, neither captured it how I needed them to. It took time for me to find the right word - "irreverence" - and when I did, I felt that 'Yes! That's it!' Be patient. The word will appear, sometimes when you least expect it.

Take stock of your 'Yes' pile. Our overall goal is to get to a maximum of 8-10 cards and then to further reduce from there. Look at the cards; is there another opportunity to combine or reduce? If you had to give one up, which one would you be willing to let go of? Perhaps it can be combined with another word or perhaps it's something that is important to you, but not a strong value.

Continue refining your 'Yes' pile until you have the three to five values that are the *most* important to you. Three to five is a great number because you'll be able to remember them. Any more would be too many to bring them to life every day. I have difficulty remembering what I ate for breakfast yesterday, so a list of 10 values won't work for me.

## VALUES DEEP DIVE

Now that you have your top three values identified (or getting closer), let's delve deeper into *why* they matter to you. In this exercise, you'll answer a few questions about each of your values, so print it out and grab your favourite pen. Here's a personal example to get you started.

### Value #1: Generosity

What generosity means to me: I give and share generously. I give food, time, resources, energy, hugs, smiles, kindness, humour, and so much more, because it matters to me. I want to leave the world a better place, and this is one of the ways I choose to do that.

I originally thought I valued service and helping others, which I learned from my mom, who was always focused on helping others. I learned that my behaviours can look like service and helping others, but those words didn't resonate with me. They didn't capture the essence of what I was about; why I behaved the way I did and what truly made my heart sing. *Generosity* was the word that touched my heart and felt so right.



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The **behaviour that helps me stay in alignment** with my value of generosity is *pausing*. I needed to identify the behaviour that would help me stay in genuine *generosity* and not resent it. That behaviour was pausing. When asked for something, I started pausing to consider all the information, asking for any missing information, and then deciding to say yes or no, or negotiate a different solution based on what I could offer. Pausing allows me to be sincere about taking on requests and favours, and to make a committed promise to deliver.

The **behaviour that takes me out of alignment** with my value of generosity is saying yes without thinking it through. This was often driven by people-pleasing tendencies and, at times, I felt fear around saying no, which resulted in me saying yes to way too many things. I also loved saying "Yes!" because it felt good in the moment. Flash forward to Saturday mornings, when I would sit in my office with a gigantic coffee and a boatload of resentment because I had to work on everything I had said yes to. It was my fault; I hadn't *operationalized* my values, leading to unintentionally stomping on them, which was hurting me.

Failing to pause, saying yes before I think about it, or before I have all the information, works against me because I end up being a resentful, coffee-slurping human on a Saturday morning, when I should be spending time with my family, friends, and on myself.

*I'll be honest, this still happens at times. Authentically living your values doesn't make life magically become easy. Rather, there are times when we bump into, trip over, and stomp on our own values. It feels icky and awful. And then we need to make amends - with ourselves and with those around us.*

When I'm fully aligned with my value of generosity, I create space and time in my day. I pause to consider offers and requests, and I use my values to help me make decisions. I'm not over-committed, hyped up on too much coffee, and feeling frantic.

**Now, it's your turn.** Remember, we're still exploring - identifying and operationalizing your values takes time. Use the words you've identified as your top values, knowing you can come back and revisit, tweak, and edit this anytime.



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Consider each of the values you identified and how they show up in your life (like I did with my value of generosity). Use the space below to write your reflections.

**Value #1 (write it here):**

What does this value mean to you?

What is one behaviour that helps you stay *in alignment* with this value?

What is one behaviour that takes you *out of alignment* with this value?

When was a time you felt aligned with this value? What was the situation? What behaviours were supporting you?

**Value #2 (write it here):**

What does this value mean to you?

What is one behaviour that helps you stay *in alignment* with this value?



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What is one behaviour that takes you *out of alignment* with this value?

When was a time you felt aligned with this value? What was the situation? What behaviours were supporting you?

**Value #3 (write it here):**

What does this value mean to you?

What is one behaviour that helps you *stay in alignment* with this value?

What is one behaviour that takes you *out of alignment* with this value?

When was a time you felt aligned with this value? What was the situation? What behaviours were supporting you?



**Now, reflect on how you are living your values.**

How does it *feel* when you're living your values?

Is there alignment between your values and your behaviours? If not, where do you believe the gaps are?

Do you need to address gaps between your values and your behaviours? If so, how will you do this?

What early warning signs signal that you might be headed in a direction that doesn't support your values?

Who can you share your values with, who will support you in living them more fully?



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How can they support you?

How can your own self-compassion support you as you explore your values?

### A FEW FINAL WORDS

Through this exercise, you may have identified your values for the first time, or you may have confirmed what you already knew. Your values are powerful because they are *yours*, regardless of the process you used to define them.

Effective, ethical leadership is about aligning your behaviours with your values. In other words, having the courage to stand up for what you believe.

I encourage you to use these cards and this process with your work team, partner, friends, and children. One of my greatest insights was learning about my son's values. It helped me understand why he made the decisions he did. Others may not have the words to tell you what their values are, so listen differently; listen with the intention of identifying what matters to them most. What frustrates them or makes them upset? What deeper meaning lies beneath the surface-level story?

Understanding our own values and those of people around us can help us make sense of so much. You might value *achievement* and I might value *balance*. Can you see how our values might be in opposition, causing us to get crunchy with each other? Bringing awareness to each other's values allows us to bring intention to how we are with one another. We could learn to say things like, 'I understand this project is important to you and you know that getting home to my family is important to me. How can we do both?'



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Maybe you have a value of *stability* and I value *adventure*. Eek! This could get sticky if we aren't aware of each other's differences and don't talk about them. You love all the change that's happening at work, while people see me as digging my heels in. But it's actually that I'm uncomfortable with the instability and it feels like no one cares.

Finally, take your time with this. Seriously. Go bump into life and get curious about what feels amazing and what makes you bananas! Get under the hood to the heart of what these feelings mean for you. I promise you - it's never the surface-level conversation that makes you bananas - there's always something underneath. Be patient with digging through the layers to get to the heart of what matters - to you and others.

If you've found this to be a valuable experience and you would like to keep working on your values, we have the following resources to share:

1. Launching in June 2024, we're introducing an on-demand course packed with materials, videos, exercises, and support to help you delve deeper into your values. Visit [bigchangeinc.com](https://bigchangeinc.com) to sign up for alerts and early bird access!
2. Find a coach specializing in values work to support your continued exploration. We have a number of coaches we can refer you to.
3. Explore values with your team. We work with teams and organizations in the area of personal and organizational values - identifying, defining and operationalizing them. Values and trust are important partners. Reach out if you want to talk about how your team could benefit.

As you work through this workbook, please reach out if you get stuck along the way or have comments, questions, or feedback. I'm always happy to hear from you (I say that with sincere generosity).

Email us at [hello@bigchangeinc.com](mailto:hello@bigchangeinc.com).



## List of Values

Acceptance	Dignity	Intuition	Safety
Accountability	Diversity	Joy	Self-Respect
Achievement	Efficiency	Justice	Serenity
Adaptability	Encouragement	Kindness	Service
Adventure	Enthusiasm	Knowledge	Silliness
Ambition	Equality	Leadership	Simplicity
Authenticity	Excellence	Learning	Stability
Autonomy	Fairness	Legacy	Stewardship
Balance	Faith	Love	Success
Beauty	Forgiveness	Loyalty	Teamwork
Belonging	Freedom	Making a Difference	Tradition
Boldness	Generosity	Meaningful Work	Tranquility
Calm	Gratitude	Openness	Trust
Caring	Grit	Optimism	Truth
Challenge	Growth	Order	Understanding
Collaboration	Happiness	Organization	Uniqueness
Commitment	Harmony	Patience	Usefulness
Community	Helpfulness	Peace	Vulnerability
Compassion	Honesty	Perseverance	Wellbeing
Competence	Hope	Pleasure	Wisdom
Confidence	Humility	Preparation	
Connection	Humour	Pride	Write your own:
Contentment	Imagination	Prudence	
Contribution	Inclusion	Recognition	
Cooperation	Independence	Reflection	
Courage	Influence	Relaxation	
Creativity	Initiative	Reliability	
Curiosity	Integrity	Respect	
Determination	Intelligence	Responsibility	



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