



Each of us has our own set of core values that's as unique as a thumb print. These core values determine what is really important to us as an individual. The surprising thing is, that even when we arrive at life's mid-way point, if you ask most people what their core values are, many would not be able to give you an answer.

Understanding the value of values

Many of the people that come on the 'Finding Your Smile' retreat have issues where their values are at the heart of the problem. They come along because they are aware that something's wrong or missing in their life but they don't know what. Often it's because they are unclear what their core values are – what's most important to them. Our values help determine our tastes, way of life, entertainment, and social, political and religious interactions. We hold many values each of which is liable to change as we grow, reach different stages of life or have different. Many people arrive at mid-life to find their core values have been suppressed, compromised or ignored completely. For some people a conflict can arise within them because they are trying to live according to the values of a company, an organisation, a religious or political organisation, their friends, colleagues or partner, rather than living a life according to their own core values. In doing this, the values of other people or organisations are being met but the person's own values are being left unfulfilled.

Paying the price

As many of my clients have realised, there's a high price to pay when they don't know what's most important to them, when they don't have clarity around their core values. It becomes very easy to let external demands and society's conditionings determine their life. The result is they feel life has lost its direction, meaning and purpose. Feelings of discomfort and dissatisfaction increase, coupled with a growing restlessness around the need to change something although they're not sure what. This is a high, yet common, price to pay in today's society. Look in most organisations and you'll find a large proportion of the work force spending 40/50 hours a week doing work they hate, whilst not knowing what else they should or could do. From my own experience I have found there is a way to tell the degree that you're life's aligned with your values. You know it's time to reconnect and close the gap when:

- You feel stressed and a sense of being out of control.
- You feel conflict or are torn between the different facets of your life.
- You're excessively busy with every minute crammed with stuff but feel like you're getting nowhere.
- You feel drained from constantly rushing to tick off your to do list that just keeps getting longer.
- You feel regretful about what you've done in the past.

Mind the gap!!!

When I speak to audiences about living their ideal life, we explore the things they are currently spending their time on and then compare them to the things they consider are really important to them, their core values. Do you think the two are aligned?

No way!! Most people discover a gap (usually a big enough one to drive a double decker bus through) between their core values, the things they stand for, and those they're currently acting on.

Now, its simple, we are either living a life that's aligned or we are not. Closing the gap between what's important and how you spend your time is the key to making your life more fulfilling and free yourself to live to your highest potential. So what's the starting point to closing the gap? To simply stop and think! With our busy lives this is easier said than done.

What's the value of knowing your values?

The good news is that you can change all of this and the best starting point is to get in touch with your core values. Fulfilment and contentment lives on the other side of their discovery and integration. By investing time and energy to get clear on your values and life purpose, by defining and articulating what you really want from all areas of your life, and then letting your values govern your decisions, you will live a fulfilling second half of life. In mid-life it's essential to question our value system and be prepared to make alterations for the next part of our journey.

How to discover your core values in simple five steps

We are going to apply my three C's formula to a better life. First, Contemplating, second, Choosing, and finally, Committing.

Contemplating

Step 1 - Take out your journal, or a blank piece of paper, and write at the top 'My Core Values.' Then answer this important life question:

"What, in life, is most important to me?"

Write down what ever comes into you head. A little tip here is not to make any judgments at this stage. Just write everything down no matter how weird, strange, amusing or scary! Use the extended list of values in the FYS resources section to help you make connections and insights into your own core values.

Step 2 – Now ask yourself, "What does (value word) mean to me?" For example you may ask, "What does money mean to me?" To which the answer could be money means; achievement, security, or freedom. By answering this second question you uncover your core or underlying value. In this example money is the means to being an achiever, or being more secure, or being freer. These are the core values.

Choosing

Step 3 - Choose no more than seven values from your total list. These should be the things that are the most important to you in life. Now put your list of values into a hierarchy of what's most important to least important. To do this put each word on a separate piece of paper. Now lay all the pieces of paper out in front of you. Looking at all your values ask yourself this question, "If I had to live my life with out one of these values, which one would I give up?" This is often a difficult question to answer because all these values are important. Push yourself to choose and put the one you're letting go off to the side. Keep asking this question until you're left with your most important value. Now you have your hierarchy of core values, put them in a place you can see them every day. Write them in bold, bright, big colours. They should be big enough to see them from across the other side of the room.

Step 4. Rewrite your top three values in order on the blanks below. Then for each value, write a definition, a statement of what it means to you to be successful in living that value. At the end of your life, looking back, how will you know if you've been successful in that area? If "Family" is one of your values, how will you know you've been successful as a family man or woman? If you put "Happiness", what does that look like to you?

1. Value:

"Success to me means . . ."

2. Value:

"Success to me means . . ."

3. Value:

"Success to me means . . ."

Now merge the three paragraphs together into one overall statement. It could be several sentences, several paragraphs or even a poem. What ever works for you! Do this now before you carry on.

You've just created a personal mission statement for your life.

Your mission statement will reflect who you are and what's important to you. Think of your personal mission statement as your constitution. Let it become your benchmark, your standard of greatness. Using it will help align your behaviour to your core values. Measure yourself against it and continuously ask yourself if your current activity is moving toward your mission in life. For example, if taking care of my health is important to me, and I eat eight slices of pizza, drink two cans of Coke, and watch five straight hours of television, then I'm not living with integrity. There's a gap between what I value and my behaviour.

Committing

Step 5 – For this exercise ask yourself, "How does my current life, work, and relationships reflect my core values?" Over the following week find out how much you are living your core values or personal mission statement. Track the way you are spending your time. Each time you do something that fulfils one of your core values write it down. By the end of the week you should have a few examples under each of your core values.

A word of caution!

It's not uncommon for some to find that they're core values are not reflected in the way they're living their lives. This can often be the most uncomfortable part of the exercise. Sometimes closing the gap between your core values and the way you currently live your life requires big life changes. I don't recommend anyone do that without professional help or at the very least a good support network.

I wish you all the best as you begin to take back control of your life and live it true to yourself.

With love

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