

How to Live with Purpose, Identify Your Values and Improve Your Leadership

Ever worked with a manager who knew what mattered and stood her ground about these things? Then you probably worked with a manager who leads from her values. Leading with values is a leadership philosophy that steps outside of measuring success by prestige, personal wealth and power. It is not about emulating the great leaders of yesteryear. Instead, it is a practice of identifying what matters to you, what you stand for and what values you have in your life. With this basis of knowing your purpose, making the right decisions in life and leadership becomes easy.

Making the right decisions is only the beginning. Leading with values is important for leaders because it creates and maintains company culture, informs employee selection, guides the direction of company growth, and adds meaning to the work required to maintain the organization. That meaning starts with the leader, and passes down to all levels of the team.

However, understanding your values and doing the “right thing” isn’t simple. In fact, for all of us, it’s a lifetime challenge that requires thought and practice. So let’s talk about the definition of a value.

What is a value?

Many people think that values are ethics or morals; they’re not. Values are what is important to us, what we ‘value’, and what gives us purpose. Just as organizations have values, individuals do too. Most people have approximately 5-7 core values that identify who they are at their core. Each person’s values are unique to that person; even if two people happen to pick the same value word, such as integrity, each person will demonstrate it differently in her daily actions and language.

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It's important to note that values aren't just for work. Values reflect who we are on a daily basis, in everything we do at home and at work. This holistic approach helps us be a leader in all aspects of our life, not just in our careers.

Why do I need to know my values?

Values give us our sense of purpose. On a leadership level, when we align with our values on a daily basis, we have more energy and feel more fulfilled because we are leading from what's important to us. When we don't align with our values, we feel less authentic and become demotivated about our daily lives, which reflects in our leadership.

Think of it as a tree: values are our roots that keep us grounded in what's important to us. The strength of the values determines the strength of the trunk, branches, leaves and fruit from year to year. A strong tree supports the ecosystem around it; a leader with strong values supports the organizational culture.

Let me give you a personal example. One of my core values is named "Wind in Your Face", which means the spirit of adventure or the feeling that I get when sitting on top of a safari vehicle with the wind blowing in my face. It's vitally important to me to try new things, make mistakes, be creative and have a sense of personal and professional adventure every day. When I align with this value, my clients and team know to expect 'out of the box' thinking from me. Some of my ideas and methodologies may seem unconventional, yet it's important for me to try them and learn from them. How do I align this with my decision-making? When evaluating a potential client, I will assess how much my client and I will stretch and grow while working together. If I feel that this potential client will provide mutual opportunity for growth, I will likely take the job. If I

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feel that the potential client isn't open to new ideas, I will likely decline the job.



How Do I Find My Values?

Values are like a compass that points us to our “true north.” Let’s review a great exercise to help you clearly identify your core values. Can you recall a moment where your life couldn’t get any better? When everything felt aligned? It may have even felt like the best day of your life. Take some time to remember this peak moment and follow these steps:

1. Describe this peak moment in detail. If you are working on this exercise alone, write the description. If you are doing this exercise with

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someone, talk about this moment for 2-3 minutes while the other person takes notes.

Here is an excerpt from my own peak moment:

One of my peak moments was taking leaders on [Safaris for the Soul](#), African safaris that I co-created with [Brian Emerson](#). I loved watching the leaders grow and develop during the two-week program. I remember clearly the blue sky and green savannah, hearing the wildlife sounds, and smelling fresh nature.

2. Think about and discuss what values are recognizable in this particular peak moment.

From the peak moment described above, you could say I value:

- *Being outdoors*
- *Working with people to develop their potential*
- *Being adventurous*

3. Pick the value or values that you've identified as most important to you. (Remember that your values apply to both your personal and professional worlds.)

From the three potential values I identified above, I pick 'adventurous' as the one that is most important to me in both my career and personal life.

4. Define what the chosen value or values mean to YOU.

To me, 'adventurous' means choosing an unconventional path, trying lots of new things, going to new places (literally and figuratively), exploring options and tinkering with ideas to find solutions.

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5. Choose a value name that resonates with YOU.

Most people would name the value I identified simply as “adventurous”. However, the word adventurous doesn’t resonate with me. Instead the name “wind in your face” is much more memorable for me as a core value.

6. Continue the process until you define approximately 5 core values.

How Do I Put My Values in Action?

Now it’s time to put your values into practice. Here are three practical tips to help you begin the process.

Tip One: Before making a decision, follow these five steps:

1. First, review your list of values. For this exercise, it is best to have your values written down.
2. Then ask yourself this question about the value you have listed as number one: “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how well does the perceived outcome of this decision or opportunity align with value number one?” Then write down the number.
3. Ask the same question about each value on your list.
4. After you’ve rated the perceived outcome of this decision or opportunity for each of your core values, add the numbers up and find the average.
5. Lastly, evaluate the score. Your aim is to get a score of seven or higher on average. If you score below seven, the decision or opportunity may not align enough with your values to be considered.

Tip Two: Check in on your values daily

Ideally, you should “check in” on your values daily. (If daily feels like too much, try weekly.) Personally, I do this on the way home from work. I ask myself, “How well did my decisions and behavior align with value #1 today?” This takes only two minutes yet provides you with a good sense

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of what to improve the next day. It keeps you focused and in touch with what is important to you.

Tip Three: Purposefully remind yourself of your values

It's important to have a visual reminder of your values, in addition to your list of values. This keeps them front and center in your mind. Here are some easy ways to remind yourself of your values on a regular basis:

- Create a screensaver.
- Don't underestimate the power of a post-it.
- Find a picture that represents one of your values and keep it somewhere you will see it daily.
- Choose a song to represent one or more of your values and listen to it once a day as part of your morning, afternoon, or evening ritual.

Discussing values is powerful and relevant to any leader. I'd love to hear about your values, how they've been put to the test, and how they've led you through tough decisions. Feel free to [email me](#), [tell me on Twitter](#), or leave a comment below.

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