

Your Core Values



"Who Am I?"
Core and Personal
Values:
How they guide
Your Life and Health

Protege Fitness

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Who am I?

What do want out of life?

What goals do I want to reach?

You cannot talk about self improvement without also talking about values. It's not enough to simply "grow" and become a "better person." You must define *what a better person is*. You must decide in which direction you wish to grow. Because if you don't, well, that becomes the pain and struggle of staying where you are and not reaching any goal in life or health

A lot of people don't realize this. A lot of people obsessively focus on being happy and feeling good all the time—not realizing that if their values suck, feeling good will hurt them more than help them. If your biggest value in the world is snorting Vicodin through a swirly straw, well, then feeling better is just going to make your life worse.

People rarely talk about values and not just what they are but *why* they are. Why we find certain things important, what the consequences of that importance are, and how we can go about changing what we find important. It's not a simple subject. And discovering your core values and what they mean can be a life long process of change. But to start a change inside ourselves we do have to start looking into OUR OWN CORE VALUES here and now to start moving forward.

What are your personal values?

Every moment of every day, whether you realize it or not, you are making a decision of how to spend your time, of what to pay attention to, of where to direct your energy.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Right now, you are choosing to go through this course, watch videos, read the materials and learn from it all to reach your goal. There are an infinite number of things you *could* be doing, but right now, you are choosing to be here. Maybe in a minute, you decide you need to pee. Or maybe someone texts you and you stop reading. When those things happen, you are making a simple, value-laden decision: your phone (or your toilet) is more valuable to you than continuing towards your current activity or goal. And your behavior follows that valuation accordingly.

Our values are constantly reflected in the way we choose to behave.

This is critically important—because we all have a few things that we *think and say we value*, but we never back them up with our actions. I can tell people (and myself) until I'm blue in the face that I care about helping the poor but if I spend my days doing things only for myself and not giving my time or money to help the poor, then my behaviors tell a different story.

Actions don't lie. We *believe* we want to get that job, but when push comes to shove, we're always kind of relieved that no one called us back so we can retreat to our video games again. We tell our girlfriend we really want to see her, but the minute our guy friends call, our schedule magically seems to open up like fucking Moses parting the Red Sea.

Many of us state values *we wish we had* as a way to cover up the values *we actually have*. In this way, aspiration can often become another form of avoidance. Instead of facing who we *really are*, we lose ourselves in who we wish to become.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Put another way: we lie to ourselves because we don't like some of our own values, and we therefore we struggle with a part of us because we don't like that part. We don't want to admit we have certain values and that we wish we had other values, and it's this discrepancy between self-perception and reality that usually gets us into all sorts of trouble.

That's because our values are extensions of ourselves. They are what define us. When something good happens to something or someone you value, you feel good. When your mom gets a new car or your husband gets a raise or your favorite sports team wins a championship, *you* feel good—as though these things happened to yourself. The opposite is true as well. If you don't value something, you will feel good when something bad happens to it. People took to the streets cheering when Osama Bin Laden was killed. People threw a party outside the prison where the serial killer Ted Bundy was executed. The destruction of someone perceived as evil felt like some great moral victory in the hearts of millions.

So, when we are disconnected from our own values—we value playing video games all day yet believe we value ambition and hard work—our beliefs and ideas get disconnected from our actions, emotions and thoughts. And to bridge that disconnect, we must become delusional, about both ourselves and about the world.

Just as we either value or devalue anything in our lives, we can value or devalue ourselves. And much like people celebrating when Ted Bundy got executed, if we begin to hate ourselves as much as people hated Ted Bundy, then we will either justify or celebrate our own destructive behavior.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

This is what many people don't understand about ourselves: that justification or self-destructive behavior sometimes can feel good in some deep, dark way. And whether it's through drugs or alcohol or any risky behavior, there's an ugly part of themselves that seeks out this destruction to justify all of the pain and misery they have felt.

Much of the work of the self-esteem movement and self improvement is to take people from self-loathing to self-loving. People who love themselves *don't* get any satisfaction from harming themselves. Rather, they get satisfaction from taking care of themselves and improving themselves.

This love for self is crucially important. But loving yourself is not enough to truly make some major changes in your life. Because if we *only* love ourselves, then we become self-absorbed and indifferent to the suffering or issues of others or our own positive growth.

Ultimately, we all need to value ourselves *but* also something above ourselves. Whether it's God or some moral code or cause, we need to value something above ourselves to make our lives feel as though they have meaning.

Because if you make yourself the highest value in your life, then you will never feel the desire to sacrifice for anything, and life will feel purposeless and just chasing our own tails in circles.

And no one wants that...

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

You are what you value

We all know that story of the middle-class, educated person with a decent job who has a mini “freak out” and decides to take a week or ten days (or ten months) and cut all contact with the outside world, run to some remote and obscure part of the globe, and proceed to “find themselves.”

Hell, maybe this has been you at some point. I know it’s been me in the past.

Here’s what people mean when they say they need to “find themselves”: they’re finding new values. Our identity—that is, the thing that we perceive and understand as the “self”—is the aggregation of everything we value. So when you run away to be alone somewhere, what you’re really doing is running away somewhere to re-evaluate your values.

Here’s how it usually plays out:

This whole process—whether done on a secluded island, a cruise ship, out in the woods somewhere, or at a raucous self-help seminar—is essentially just an escapade in adjusting one’s values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

- You are experiencing a large amount of pressure and/or stress in your day-to-day life.
- Due to said pressure and/or stress, you feel as though you are losing control of the direction of your own life. You don't know what you're doing or why you're doing it. You begin to feel as though your own desires or decisions no longer matter. Maybe you want to drink mojitos and play banjo—but the overwhelming demands of your school/job/family/partner make it so that you feel as though you're not able to live out those desires.
- This is the “self” you feel you have “lost”—a sense that you are no longer the one navigating the ship of your own existence. Rather, you are blown back and forth across the sea of life by the winds of your responsibilities—or some other deep-sounding metaphor.
- By removing yourself from these pressures and/or stressors, you are able to recover a sense of control over yourself. You are, once again, in charge of your own day-to-day existence without the interference of a million external pressures.
- Not only that, but by gaining separation from the turbulent forces of your day-to-day life, you are able to look at those forces from afar and have perspective on whether you actually *want* the life that you have. Is this who you are? Is this what you care about? You question your decisions and priorities.
- You decide that there are a few things you want to change. There are things you believe you care about too much and you want to stop. There are other things that you feel you should care about more and promise to prioritize them. You are now constructing the “new you.”
- You then vow to return to the “real world” and live out your new priorities, to be your “new self”—especially because you now have a bitching tan.

You leave, get perspective on what in your life matters to you, the parts of life that truly matter the most, what should matter less, and then (ideally) return and get on with it. By returning and changing your priorities, you change your values, and you come back “a new person.”

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Values are the fundamental component of our psychological make-up and our own personal identity. We are defined by what we choose to find important in our lives. We are defined by our prioritizations. If money matters more than anything, then that will come to define who we are. If helping others is the most important thing in our life, that will come to define who we are. And if we feel like shit about ourselves and believe we don't deserve love, success, or intimacy, then that will also come to define who we are—through our actions, our words, and our decisions.

Any change in self is a change in the configuration of our values. We see this often when a tragedy happens it devastates us because not only do we feel sadness, but because we lose something we value. And when we lose enough of what we value, we begin to question the value of life itself. If we lose someone we love, that can crush us. It calls into question who we are, our value as a human, and what we know about the world. It throws us into an crisis, *an identity crisis*, because we don't know what to believe, feel, or do anymore. This loss and change can sometimes leave us in place of no direction, lack of emotion and bad behaviors to replace what we lost.

This change in identity composition is true for positive events as well though. When something incredible happens, we don't just experience the joy of winning or achieving some goal, we also go through a change in valuation for ourselves—we come to see ourselves as more valuable, as more deserving. An NEW MEANING is added to the world. Our life vibrates with increased intensity. And *that* is what is so powerful.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Why some personal values are better than others

Before we get into exactly *how* to change our personal values, let's talk about which values are healthy and which values are harmful. *Each person might define these differently:* I defined healthy and unhealthy values in the following way: I also don't always like labels like good and bad because it can cause more self abuse. That is why looking at values you should really never say they are bad but does this value serve you to who you want to become.

Healthy values are:

1. Evidence-based
2. Constructive
3. Controllable

Unhealthy values are:

1. Emotion-based
2. Destructive
3. Uncontrollable

Evidence-based vs Emotion-based Values

If you've ever read or listened to anything about self improvement, you've seen a constant theme: overly relying on our emotions is unreliable at best and damaging at the worst. Unfortunately, most of us rely too much on our emotions without even realizing it.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Psychological research shows that most of us, most of the time, make decisions and are inspired from emotions and feelings, rather than based on knowledge or information. Psychological research also shows us that our feelings are generally self-centered, willing to give up long-term benefits for short-term gains, and are often warped and/or delusional.

People who lead their lives based on how they feel will find themselves on a treadmill, constantly needing more, more, more. And the only way to step off that treadmill is to decide that something matters more than your own feelings—that some cause, some goal, some person, some purpose, some reason is worth occasionally getting hurt for.

That “cause” is often what we refer to as our “purpose” and finding it is one of the most important endeavors we can take to enhance our health and well-being. But our purpose should be sought not only on what feels good and emotions. It must be considered and reasoned. We must accumulate evidence supporting it. Otherwise, we’ll spend our lives chasing a mirage. This is where many people are, stuck, trapped and frustrated.

Constructive vs Destructive Values

This one sounds simple, but will start to scramble your brain if you think about it enough.

We don’t want to value things that harm ourselves or others. We do want to value things that enhance ourselves and others.

Duh.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Now, determining what is actually spurring growth and what is actually harming us can get complicated. Busting your ass at the gym technically damages your body—but it also causes your body and mind to become stronger and healthier. Having a few drinks or getting high can be fun on certain occasions and in some circumstances, but if you do it everyday to numb yourself, then you're probably causing more emotional harm than good. Having casual sex can be a means to enhance personal confidence but also a means to avoid intimacy or emotional maturity.

There's a blurry line between growth and harm. And they often appear as two sides of the same coin. This is why what you value is often not as important as *why you value it*. If you value martial arts because you enjoy hurting people, then that's a bad value. But if you value it because you want to be healthier and want to learn to protect yourself and others—that's a good value. Ultimately, it's the intention that matters most.

Controllable vs Uncontrollable Values

When you value things that are outside your control, you essentially give up your life to that thing.

The most classic example of this is money. Yes, you have some control over how much money you can make but not total control. Economies collapse, companies go under, entire professions can be removed by technology. If everything you do is for the sake of money, and then tragedy strikes and all of that money is eaten up by hospital bills, you will lose much more than a loved one—you will lose your perceived purpose for living as well.

Money is a bad value because you can't always control it. Creativity or industriousness or a strong work ethic are good values because you CAN control them—and doing them well will ultimately generate money as a side effect.

We need values we can control, otherwise our values control us. Once you have given up control your whole life is now trapped by it.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Some examples of good, healthy values: honesty, building something new, standing up for oneself, standing up for others, self-respect, curiosity, charity, humility, creativity.

Some examples of bad, unhealthy values: dominating others through manipulation or violence, feeling good all the time, always being the center of attention, not being alone, being liked by everybody, being rich for the sake of being rich, doing whatever it takes even if means hurting others.

How to Reinvent Yourself

One of the most inspiring TED Talks I've ever come across on this subject is from Daryl Davis. It's not filled with mind-blowing ideas. You're not going to get huge takeaways that you can immediately run off and implement in your own life. It is about real time facts and change.....I find these so powerful.

What he describes is absolutely profound:

Daryl Davis is a black musician who has traveled and played blues shows all over the US south. In his career, he's inevitably run into a number of white supremacists. And rather than fight them or argue with them, he chose to do something unexpected: he befriended them.

This might sound insane. And maybe it is. But here's what's more insane: he's convinced over 200 KKK members to give up their robes.

Here's what most people don't get about value change: you can't argue someone out of their values. You can't shame them into valuing something different (shaming them actually often has the opposite effect—they double down).

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Nope, value change is far more subtle than that. And perhaps without even realizing it, Daryl Davis appears to be a master at it.

Step 1: The value must fail.

Davis intuitively understood something that almost all of us do not: values are based on *experience*. You cannot argue someone out of their values. You cannot threaten them to let go of their most deeply-held beliefs. That just makes them defensive and even more resistant to changing themselves. Instead, you must approach them with empathy.

The only way to change someone's values is by presenting them with a contrary experience to their value. The KKK members held deeply racist values and instead of attacking them and approaching them as an adversary—in a way that would reflect their values back to them—Davis chose to approach them in the completely opposite way: as a friend. And that friendliness and respect caused the KKK members to call everything they knew into question.

To let go of a value, it must be contradicted through experience. Sometimes this contradiction happens by taking the value to its logical conclusion. Too much partying ultimately makes life feel empty and meaningless. Pursuing too much money ultimately brings greater stress and alienation.

Other times, a value is contradicted by the real world. Many KKK members that met Davis had never known a black person, much less one they respected. So, he simply met them and then earned their respect.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Step 2: We must have the self-awareness to recognize that our values have failed.

When our values fail, it's terrifying. There's a grief process that takes place. Since our values constitute our identity and our understanding of who we are, losing a value feels as though we're losing a part of ourselves.

Therefore, we resist that failure. We explain it away and deny it. We come up with rationalizations. Davis said that for months, his KKK friends would struggle to justify their friendship with him. They would say things like, "Well, you're different Daryl," or create elaborate justifications for why they respected him.

When our values fail, we have two knee-jerk justifications: 1) the world sucks, or 2) we suck.

Let's say you spend your entire life chasing money. And then, in your 40s, you accumulate a good amount. But instead of diving and swimming in gold coins like Scrooge McDuck, this money doesn't bring you happiness, it brings you more stress. You have to figure out how to invest it. You have to pay taxes on seemingly everything. Friends and family members continuously approach you looking for help or handouts.

But instead of considering that the value sucks, that maybe you should care about something more than money, most people instead blame the world around them. It's the government's fault because they punish wealth and success. The world is full of moochers and lazy people who just want a handout. The stock market is a racket and impossible to win.

Others blame themselves. They think, "I *should* be able to handle this, therefore I just need to make even more money and everything will be alright." They get caught on a treadmill of constantly pursuing their value more and more until they become a sort of extremist.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Few people stop to consider that the value itself is at fault. That valuing money got you into this situation, therefore there's no way it can get you out.

Step 3: Question the value and brainstorm what values could do a better job.

This is almost a process of maturity and it is personal growth by replacing low-level, material values, with higher-level, abstract values. So instead of chasing money all the time, you could chase freedom. Instead of trying to be liked by everyone, you could value developing intimacy with a few. Instead of trying to win everything, you could focus on merely giving your best effort.

These higher-level, abstract values are better because they *produce better problems*. If your primary value in life is how much money you have, then you will always need more money. But if your primary value is personal freedom, then you will need more money for a while, but there might be some situations where you need *less* money. Or, where money is completely irrelevant.

Ultimately, abstract values are values you can control. You can always control whether you're being honest or not. You cannot control if people like you. You can always control whether you're giving your best effort. You can't always control if you win or not. You can always control if you're doing something you mind meaningful, you can't always control how much you'll get paid.

Step 4: Live the new value.

So, here's the catch: sitting around thinking about better values to have is nice. But nothing will solidify until you go out and embody that new value. Values are won and lost through life experience. Not through logic or feelings or even beliefs. They have to be lived and experienced to stick. Sorry: but success is built by doing hard things everyday! That is where change occurs...

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

This often takes courage. To go out and live a value contrary to your old values is extremely scary. I imagine the KKK guys were terrified to spend time with a black man. It probably freaked them out when they realized they liked him and respected him. They probably avoided him and put up walls between themselves and him.

We do the same thing in our own lives all the time. It's easy to want authentic relationships. But it's hard to live them. It's scary. We avoid it. We come up with excuses for why we have to wait, or can't do something right now. But the "next time" inevitably ends up being another failure and another pain.

Step 5: Reap the benefits of the new value.

But when you do summon the courage to live out your new values, something crazy happens: it feels good. You experience the benefits. And once you experience those benefits, not only does it become easier to continue living the new value, but it sounds insane that you didn't do this sooner.

It's like the high you get after a good run. Or the relief you feel after telling someone the truth. Or the liberation you feel when you change the way you view the world and it changes the world for the better!

Like jumping into a cold pool, the terror and shock passes and you're left with a wonderful sense of relief, and a newer, deeper understanding of who you really are.

If I watch TV I try to make it something that is educational and expands who I am or my understanding on a subject. If there were a channel that played Tony Robbins seminars non-stop, I'd watch it like a teenage girl glued to an *America's Next Top Model* marathon. Say what you want about Robbins (opinions range from him being a complete hack and fraud to him being the second coming of Jesus Christ; my opinion is somewhere in the middle), but his seminars are never dull. The guy knows how to market helping people.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Robbins' seminars have some informal portions where people in the (massive) audience are able to stand up and address their personal issues with Tony one-on-one, in a kind of private counseling session... in front of 2,000 other people. Tony manhandles their emotional worlds, reshaping their realities in front of your eyes, all to thunderous applause. Whether it's genuine or not, it's never boring, and it's usually educational.

(A good friend of mine who is a psychologist and therapist refers to Robbins as the Batman of Psychology – sometimes he has to break the rules and do some unethical things, but it's always for the greater good.)

In one seminar, a middle-aged man in the audience stood up and confessed that he was suicidal. He then shared his story: he was a finance guy, a very good finance guy. He made a fortune and not only that, but his friends and family members gave him their savings to manage and he made them fortunes as well. His entire life he had been successful and made a lot of people a lot of money.

And then one day he lost it all.

When prodded by Robbins, his reasoning for wanting to kill himself was that his life insurance policy would pay enough to support his wife and children after he was gone, whereas if he stayed alive, his family would be saddled by debt and left broke. When Robbins threw out the obvious point that while his kids would grow up with financial stability, they wouldn't have a father, the man calmly asserted, "Yes, exactly. That's the idea."

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

What immediately strikes you is this man's dumbfounding belief that his kids need financial stability more than a living father. And it'd be easy to discount him as a loony for that and be on our merry way.

But if we take a moment and empathize with him and dig a bit deeper into his motivation, we discover something important about his self-perception: **This man perceives the value of his own life to be nothing more than financial.**

He has no sense of value in himself as a father, husband, friend, companion, not to mention any other skills or hobbies. It's not just that he thinks his kids would be better off with money than with him, *it's that he believes his only value as a person is his ability to make money.*

Robbins quickly pounced on the nub of the issue: this man had never emotionally invested himself or identified with his roles as a father, a husband, a friend, a colleague – he had invested all of his identity (and time and effort) in making money and becoming rich. Then once his wealth vanished, so did his entire sense of self.

A while back, I saw a short video of Tim Ferris (Famous author of the 4 Hour Work Week) and in passing, he mentioned a concept called “identity diversification.” He more or less said the following:

When you have money, it's always smart to diversify your investments. That way if one of them goes south, you don't lose everything. It's also smart to diversify your identity, to invest your self-esteem and what you care about into a variety of different areas – business, social life, relationships, philanthropy, athletics – so that when one goes south, you're not completely screwed over and emotionally wrecked.

I loved this idea. It's one of those ideas that's so obvious yet so elusive. When you hear it, it makes you feel like you just woke up. Identity diversification.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

What Is Identity?

Whether consciously or unconsciously, we all choose what is important to us; we choose what we value. We choose the measuring sticks with which we measure success and our self-worth. Common measuring sticks people often choose include: being success in a business or career, being highly educated, making a lot of money, being an excellent father/husband, being pious and faithful in a chosen religion, being socially and/or sexually popular and desired, being physically attractive or beautiful, and on and on.

Whatever we choose to judge our self-worth by, be it how big of a fan we are for our favorite sports team or making more money than any of our friends or getting more attention from the opposite sex, we are choosing in which way we want to receive validation to feel good about ourselves. Like a mural, whatever you choose to value and receive validation from is what builds and grows into your overall identity.

Most of us naturally gravitate toward certain aspects of our identity merely through growing up and having attention or praise lavished on us for particular reasons. Maybe you were the smart kid, or the good-looking quarterback, or the popular musician, or whatever. The validation we receive growing up largely determines how we choose to value ourselves in our adult life.

Some of us also experienced emotional or physical traumas early on and therefore many of us get fixated on certain aspects of our identity more than others. Social pressures can also force us into over-identifying with a certain aspect of our identity, which then drowns out other areas of our lives.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

For instance, the movie *Blow* is a true story about drug smuggler George Jung. Jung grew up in a poor family with a father who had trouble paying the bills. As a result, Jung grew up identifying disproportionately with earning money and being rich and doing it in whatever way he could. Once he began smuggling drugs, the social pressures of those around him, the drug cartels and the lifestyle he lived continued to reinforce his choice to receive validation from money and wealth. Even if you haven't seen the movie, it's fairly obvious that eventually his life unraveled along with all of the relationships that mattered most to him and his freedom.

In my own life, I when I was building my business and often working 14-16 hour days simply to make a rent payment, a simple refund request or 2-3 days with no new sales could send me spiraling into a depression. Or my self worth around how many people I hung around with at night and the weekends and not the actual people in my life that mattered like family and true friends that if I was by myself I felt worthless. Both of these examples from my life were times when I was investing myself completely into one area – business or going to bars – and forsaking other important areas of my life and my identity.

In the case of the man in Robbins' seminar, he lived an entire life that reinforced his identity as a man who could make money. He worked 100 hour weeks for decades. He made millions. Everyone who knew him as the man who could make money and he did. Many of them knew him and liked him *because* he could make money.

This constant reinforcement and lack of diversity in his life eventually warped his perception in himself away from being a father, a husband, a friend, a role model, and instead, a walking bank account. That's all that came to matter to him and his identity. He had nothing else going for him because he never invested in any other aspects of his relationships. And when the money went, so did his self-worth along with it.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

What Do You Care About?

One could take this advice as merely being a well balanced individual. The problem is, people can be well-balanced but still not have a diverse identity. They can participate in a lot of different activities, but still derive the majority of their validation and self-worth from one source.

For instance, let's say you're a well-balanced individual with a successful law career, a spouse, some cool hobbies, and you enjoy reading in your spare time. But in reality, your career dominates your identity. You work so much that you have little with which to relate to your spouse other than work. Your hobbies all involve your coworkers. Your reading relates to your career. You have no diversity.

A lot of people I know in finance are like this. Their friends are their co-workers. The the things they read and movies they watch relate to their job. Their social excursions are work and networking functions. They meet up with people who like doing work-related things. There's no diversification of where they're receiving their validation. And therefore their emotional stability and self-esteem is at risk.

If you invest all of your identity in one basket, then you put your self-esteem and emotional well-being at risk.

American Football player Junior Seau committed suicide a few years after retiring. A lot of discussions have taken place about athletes and how they can regain their lost identity once they retire. One can't imagine what they must feel, having gone their entire lives since childhood being recognized for being great at a single activity, and then once they hit their 40's, it's all taken away.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Seau is not the only casualty. There's the story about Hall of Fame football player William "Refrigerator" Perry and his descent into depression and alcoholism after retirement. Or stories on soccer legends Pele and Maradona and their inability to let go of their pasts. Or how even on Michael Jordan and his continued bitterness and insecurities after retirement?

Three years ago, the thought of my business going under terrified me. I stayed up entire nights worrying about if a new avenue to bring in clients would make me money or not. When they didn't I would lose sleep *again* trying to figure out why.

Ironically, now after going through many trials and being shut down because of COVID, my identity isn't as invested in it, and if it failed tomorrow I don't think I'd be as devastated now as I would have been three years ago. Why? Because I've been working on diversifying my identity for several years now. — if my business crashed, it would surely suck and be stressful, but I imagine emotionally I would hold up much better.

What do you care about? I mean, what do you *really* care about? Invest yourself in a wide range of areas. If you like music, start attending concerts or learn an instrument. Don't just travel as a vacation, but invest in learning about the cultures. Learn a new language. Make time for old friends. Pick up new hobbies. Get competitive in something. Expand yourself beyond your work and your relationships. Go out for no other reason than to be with your friends. Learn how to dance. Take some time off work. Attend a meditation or health retreat or another self improving or skill building adventure.

And don't just do something else, but care about it, invest yourself in it.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

If you don't invest in yourself, you become like our finance guru at a Tony Robbins seminar. Because chances are, the Batman of Psychology is not going to be around to save you.

Living by your personal values sounds easy—at least in theory. Your values, after all, are simply the things that are important to you in life, so it should be natural to live by them.

Coming up with a list of personal values can be challenging, yet understanding your values is important.

And yet so many of us don't consistently live by our values. Have you ever been in any of these situations?

- Someone said or did something that you strongly disagreed with, but you didn't speak up about it and felt ashamed afterwards.
- You set goals for yourself and then failed to meet them.
- Your life or career haven't worked out the way you wanted them to.
- What you want often clashes with what you've got to do or what's "practical."
- You're so busy pleasing other people that you're not even sure what your own true values are.

If any of these resonate with you, then this building your core values will help you greatly. Start by going through all the steps involved in defining and prioritising your values, changing them as necessary, and living by them so that your actions are aligned with your values.

When you live by your values, you feel better about yourself and are more focused on doing the things that are important to you. It's time to learn how to achieve that. Here are some amazing steps to start the process...

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

1. What Are Personal Core Values (And Why Do They Matter)?

Let's start with a personal core values definition. Personal core values are the things that are important to us, the characteristics and behaviors that motivate us and guide our decisions.

For example, maybe you value honesty. You believe in being honest wherever possible and you think it's important to say what you really think. When you don't speak your mind, you probably feel disappointed in yourself.

Or maybe you value kindness. You jump at the chance to help other people, and you're generous in giving your time and resources to worthy causes or to friends and family.

Those are just two examples of personal values out of many. Everyone has their own personal values, and they can be quite different. Some people are competitive, while others value cooperation. Some people value adventure, while others prefer security.

Values matter because you're likely to feel better if you're living according to your values and to feel worse if you don't. This applies both to day-to-day decisions and to larger life choices.

If you value adventure, for example, you'll probably feel trapped if you let yourself be pressured by others into making "safe" choices like a stable office job and a settled home life. For you, a career that involves travel, starting your own business, or other opportunities for risk and adventure may be more appropriate.

On the other hand, if you value security, the opposite applies. What some people would view as a "dream" opportunity to travel the world and be your own boss may leave you feeling insecure and craving a more settled existence.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Everybody is different, and what makes one person happy may leave another person feeling anxious or disengaged. Defining your personal values and then living by them can help you to feel more fulfilled and to make choices that make *you* happy, even if they don't make sense to other people. You'll see how to go about doing that in the following sections.

2. How to Define Your Personal Core Values

What makes you feel good? That's a good place to start when figuring out what your values are.

No, "ice cream" isn't a value. What we're talking about here are characteristics or ways of behaving in the world. As we saw above, someone who values honesty will feel good when they tell the truth.

Conversely, that same person will feel bad about themselves when they *don't* tell the truth. So negative emotions can also be a good guide to your values. When have you felt disappointed in yourself or like you were a fraud? What behaviour led up to that?

Here are some more questions to get you started:

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

1. What's important to you in life?
2. If you could have any career, without worrying about money or other practical constraints, what would you do?
3. When you're reading news stories, what sort of story or behaviour tends to inspire you?
4. What type of story or behaviour makes you angry?
5. What do you want to change about the world or about yourself?
6. What are you most proud of?
7. When were you the happiest?

Take a blank sheet of paper and quickly brainstorm some answers to these questions. Then use those answers as guides to figuring out your personal values.

In some cases, the values will be easy to figure out. If you wrote “a loving relationship” in response to the question about what’s important to you, then “love” is an important personal value for you. If you wrote “being happy,” then you value happiness.

Others may require a bit more work, though. For example, if you’re inspired by stories of successful entrepreneurs, maybe you value determination or achievement, or maybe it’s wealth and success. If you’re inspired by activists trying to change the world, maybe you value courage or integrity, or maybe it’s justice or peace. Try to examine what exactly it is about those stories or experiences that you relate to.

List of Personal Values

To help you, here’s a list of personal values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

- Authenticity
- Achievement
- Adventure
- Authority
- Autonomy
- Balance
- Beauty
- Boldness
- Compassion
- Challenge
- Citizenship
- Community
- Competency
- Contribution
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Determination
- Fairness
- Faith
- Fame
- Friendships

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

- Fun
- Growth
- Happiness
- Honesty
- Humor
- Influence
- Inner Harmony
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Love
- Loyalty
- Meaningful Work
- Openness
- Optimism
- Peace
- Pleasure
- Poise
- Popularity

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

- Recognition
- Religion
- Reputation
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Security
- Self-Respect
- Service
- Spirituality
- Stability
- Success
- Status
- Trustworthiness
- Wealth
- Wisdom

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

This is by no means an exhaustive list of personal values. I'm sure you can think of plenty more. The idea isn't to pick items from a list, but to come up with your own based on your own experiences and personality, so please use these as examples of personal values, but don't feel limited by them. Let your imagination run free!

When you've finished brainstorming, you may have half a dozen values, or you may have a huge list of dozens. If you're in the second camp, try to cut the list down to something manageable—perhaps ten values that mean the most to you. If you're struggling, try assigning scores to each one and then sorting the list in order.

3. How to Prioritise Your Personal Values

Once you've come up with a list, it's important to prioritise your values.

Why? Because prioritising can help you get even closer to defining what's important to you.

Your overall list of values may include quite disparate values. If you value honesty, health, kindness, adventure and half a dozen other things, it doesn't give you a clear direction. But if you put "health" right at the top of your list, you'll know that establishing a daily exercise routine and cutting out the junk food should be priorities for you. If "adventure" is at the top, on the other hand, maybe planning that trip to South America will come first.

Ideally, of course, you'll live according to all the values on your list. But your time and energy are limited.

Prioritising helps you to ensure that you're spending them on the most important things that'll have the biggest payoff in your life. So take some time to reorder the items in your list by using the scoring system we covered in the last section. Or you could compare each item in turn and ask yourself which you would work on if you could do only one. Take your time, and keep going until you end up with a final order you're happy with.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

4. How to Live Your Values With Integrity and Use Them to Make Decisions

Having a list of values on a sheet of paper is nice, but it doesn't change anything. To see a difference in your life, you'll have to start living by your values. As we've seen, that can be easier said than done. So in this section, we'll look at how to use your values to actually live your life and make decisions.

Use Your Values for Goal Setting

First, let's look at the big picture. Are you living according to your values in your life as a whole? Does your career choice reflect your values? How about your activities outside of work? Are you spending your time on things that matter to you?

If not, don't worry—it's quite common for our lives to diverge from our values for any number of reasons. Here's how to get things back on track.

For each of your values, make a list of things you could do to put those values into practice. For example, if you wrote "Learning," you could go back to college and do that degree you've always dreamed of. Or you could commit to read a book every week on a subject that you care about. Or you could take online training courses or sign up for classes at your local adult education centre. There are so many possibilities.

Don't be constrained by practical considerations at this stage. Just write down possibilities, even if you think you can't afford them or don't have time. Make a list of things you *could* do to live by your values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

You should end up with a long list of possible actions for each value. The next step is to make them into goals for the next week, month, year, and perhaps longer.

If you already have goals that you've set before, you'll also need to take one additional step. For each goal, ask yourself whether it aligns with any of your personal values. If not, why are you doing it? Unless there's a very good practical reason, delete it and focus instead on the new goals that do help you live according to your values.

Make Decisions According to Your Values

Living your values is about more than the big, long-term goals, however. It's also about the small, day-to-day decisions. In the moment, do you react to situations in ways that align with your values?

If you value compassion, for example, do you regularly display compassion towards others, or do you sometimes slip into judgment and blame? If you value health, do you always take care of your body, or do you sometimes end up eating burgers instead of bulgur?

It's not always easy to make your actions align with your values. Anything from force of habit to the lure of immediate gratification can be powerful enough to make us forget those good intentions and act in ways that don't reflect our values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

You've got many techniques available to you to help you change your reactions and live more consciously in accordance with your values. For example, you could:

- Make a habit of reading your list of values every morning when you wake up.
- Visualise the day ahead and plan out how you'll live by your values throughout the day.
- Print out your values and keep them close to you to refer to through the day.
- Make them the background on your mobile phone or computer.
- Set up reminders to pop up on your phone.
- Whenever you find yourself straying from your values, analyse the situation afterwards and ask yourself what you could have done differently.

Possible Barriers to Overcome

So far, it sounds quite simple, doesn't it? So why do so many of us still struggle to live according to our values?

Sometimes it's about lack of clarity or not knowing what your values really are. The values exercises should help bring in clarity and ability to overcome struggles in your life and deal with problems quite effectively.

But there are other possible barriers, too. What if your personal values come into conflict with those of your family or the wider society? For example, you may value adventure but a family member hates crowds or going out.

Or perhaps you're facing a conflict between your personal values and the practical situation you find yourself in. You may value creativity, but you've got family members to take care of, so you can't take the risk of embarking on an art career. Or you may value honesty, but feel that there are certain lies you need to tell in order to preserve important relationships, to keep your job, or whatever else.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

These are important barriers, and they're worth reflecting on seriously. But it's also worth remembering that there are many ways to live your values, and you don't have to reject all compromises and ignore practical considerations.

For example, it's quite possible to live according to a value of honesty while also inserting a caveat like "... as long as my honesty doesn't hurt other people." That would help preserve those important relationships. And if you've got to be dishonest in order to keep your job, maybe that's a signal that, in the long term, you need to find a new job. But in the short term, you don't need to get fired by telling your boss exactly what you think. You can compromise for now, while moving in the long term towards a solution that's more in line with your values.

If your values come into conflict with those of others or the wider society, you may face some difficulties, but you can still live with integrity in your own life. If your circumstances allow, you can also fight to change society according to your own beliefs. Look at many of the heroes of history like Susan B. Anthony or Martin Luther King, Jr., and you'll find people whose personal values came into conflict with those of their time. But if you don't feel ready for that kind of struggle, then you could choose to focus on your own actions and on living according to your own values, without challenging those around you who live differently.

5. How to Adapt and Change Your Values When Needed

Your personal values aren't set in stone. While some of your core values will probably stay the same throughout your life, others may change as your life circumstances change or simply as you get older and start to have a different view of what's important. Or even if the values stay the same, the order in which you prioritise them may shift.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

For example, starting a family and having children to take care of may cause you to value security and financial stability more highly than you did when you were single. Or a divorce may result in a renewed desire for freedom and self-discovery.

So it's worth checking in regularly to see if your values have changed. Repeat the process of brainstorming, listing and prioritising, and see if your results are different.

How often should you do this? At least once a year is probably a good idea, and any time you go through a major life change like job loss, bereavement, illness, divorce, etc.

Of course, you'll also want to keep reading your values and referring to them much more regularly than once a year, and if at any time you notice that something just doesn't feel right any more, feel free to revise your values then and there.

Once you've come up with your new list, re-examine your goals and rewrite them where necessary to reflect your new or newly prioritised values. And start using your revised list of values to inform and direct your daily life, as discussed in the previous section.

Conclusion

We've covered a lot of ground, and I hope you're now much clearer about what personal core values are, why they're important, and how you can do a better job of living in alignment with your values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

The next step, if you haven't already, is to put the lessons into practice. Start brainstorming, making lists, prioritising your values, and setting value-driven goals. Then start living by your values from day to day, month to month, and year to year.

Integrity Reports

I use my core values to create my annual Integrity Reports. Writing these reports is something that I do at least once a year that forces me to think about how I am living out my core values in real life. Write them down and then start the process over.

Circle your most important 3 or 5 values. For each of these, write down three or more actions that define what it would mean for you to live these values. For example, if you value Loyalty, actions might include forgiving a friend for a betrayal, negotiating fair treatment at work to ensure your commitment to your employer, or choosing not to engage in extramarital affairs.

Now, write down one thing you have done that does not reflect each your top 3 to 5 values. For example, if you value optimism, it's a more value-driven choice to think positively than to worry about the future.

Next, write down what you could do differently next time. Maybe instead of bracing for the worst, you could think about what could go right, what you might learn, or what cool things you have to look forward to in the future.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

As you are doing this activity, you may discover that there are ways that you could live in closer alignment with your personal core values. It may be hard to follow through on some of the actions you identified. Maybe you would need to stop drinking. Maybe you would need to change jobs. Maybe you would need to have some difficult conversations. It's quite easy to go with the flow and lose sight of our values. It's a lot harder to live by our values and do what's right for ourselves in the long run.

What if you haven't been living your values?

For one woman I know—a kind, smart, caring person—the rift between her values and her actions became apparent when she started leaving her boyfriend at home so she could gain attention and physical satisfaction from other men. It was clear from the outside that these actions went against her values. So even though her actions made her feel good in the moment, each night she would go home feeling terrible.

For another woman I know—a strong, giving, selfless person—the growing gap between her values and actions was revealed when she started asking loved ones for things that she could sell to buy drugs. Never had she been the kind of person that couldn't handle a challenge. Never had she been willing to take from others. But in the middle of fighting her addiction, she lost her track of her values. Thankfully, she recovered. But even after, it was only when she again started living her values that she was able to rebuild her life and happiness.

The tricky thing about values, though, is that we all hold different ones. For each of us who loses track of our values, the outcome will look different. And many of us have never asked ourselves what our values are or what it would look like if we weren't living them. So we easily get lost.

By identifying what we need to do to live our values, we can start becoming the person that we want to be. And as it gets easier to love ourselves, we begin to feel happier.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Live Your Values

When I first did this activity, I discovered that kindness is one of my top values. I was living this value in some ways, with some people, and in some situations, but I had some major gaps. For one, I could be really mean to some people in my life, criticizing or getting angry for the smallest things. I could tell you I acted this way because I was angry or hurt, but these are just rationalizations—excuses I told myself to justify my behavior. The truth is that living your values is hard, and I wasn't yet ready to put in the work.

At first, I could still tell myself I was kind when I was being mean, that I was in fact living my values. But one day I realized I was just making excuses, and I didn't recognize myself anymore. I was not who I wanted to be. It seemed scary and overwhelming to start living my values, but I decided that day that I had to do it. And you can do it too.

To start, take a look at the values list you created in the last activity. For each of your most important values, ask yourself 3 sets of questions and record your answers:

1. Are there any people with whom you have a difficult time living this value? Maybe your romantic partner, parent, sibling, coworker, or friend?
2. Are there any situations that make it difficult for you to practice this value? Where are you, or what are you doing when you fail to practice these values? For example, maybe you're at work, at home, out at a bar, on social media, in the car, or at the day care center.
3. Is there anything else that makes it difficult for you to live your personal values? For example, maybe you live your values in the morning but not at night, when in your hometown but not on vacation, or on Monday but not Friday.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Once you've identified the external events that trigger you to veer away from your core values, it's key that you identify why these experiences affect you this way.

Look through all of the people and situations that lead you to stray from your values and ask yourself what thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations lead you to act differently than you would like to.

The emotions that trigger you may be the same across all situations, or they may be different. So just write down anything you think of that leads you away from your values. These emotions, thoughts, and associated bodily sensations are at the root of what causes us to abandon our values. When we act in a way that's inconsistent with our values, we are just attempting to justify, regulate or ignore our actions, even if only temporarily.

Identify Value Conflicts

If you've been following up this point, you now know which feelings or thoughts lead you away from living your values. To move forward, we need to deal with these feelings, emotions and actions in new ways. Easier said than done, though. Often the emotions that we're dealing with arise because our needs are being thwarted. A woman may gossip about a coworker's poor job performance because she doesn't feel secure in her own job. Or a man may micromanage other people at work because he still feels powerless from when his parents hit him as a child.

Our actions—even the ones we're not proud of—usually make sense when we look at them as attempts to get our needs met. If you're struggling to live your values, you likely have a conflict between living your values and getting your needs met. The way forward? Learn how to get your needs met in new ways—ways that don't conflict with your values.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

To identify any potential value conflicts, take a moment now to reflect on what the upside is when you go against your values. What are you getting out of the actions you take? What positive emotions are you feeling? What needs are being satisfied when you go against your values? Do you feel excited? Safe? Loved?

Now, ask yourself how else you could get these needs met. What might be healthier ways?

For example, The woman who feels insecure in her job could take some online courses to make herself more valuable to the company, or she could start researching new jobs online. The man who feels powerless could create and lead an online group for a good cause, helping him gain a sense of power with a more positive outcome.

All of these changes require self-awareness, honesty, and effort, but they are necessary for resolving conflicts between our values and needs.

For me to begin living in alignment with my values, I first stopped being so mean, even when I felt that others deserved it. Living my values felt great, but I quickly discovered that some of my needs were not being met. By being mean to people who hurt my feelings, I was unconsciously telling myself that I didn't deserve to be treated this way, that I was a person worthy of love, respect, and appreciation. But being a jerk only made people treat me worse.

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

I found that the only way for me to get past my point of conflict was to learn how to communicate more effectively, so that I could tell people how I would and how I would not allow them to treat me. This is really a weakness of mine, and I still struggle with it today, but the more I love, respect, and appreciate myself by not letting others treat me poorly, the better I feel and the easier it is to both live my values and get my needs met. Now I react to feelings of not being appreciated more effectively—for example—by telling others how I would like to be treated.

Changing your life is never easy, but it's always worth it. Give this activity a shot and I hope you can start living in closer alignment with your core personal values.

Take this quiz to explore the multiple aspects of your well-being.

Rate each one on a scale of 1-10: 1 being I Strongly Disagree and 10 being I Strongly Agree.

Also DO NOT OVER THINK the answers. Answer them with your first gut reaction these are normally the most accurate. We will go over them after. There are no right or wrong answers this helps you to look in the mirror. It will help to see things you might be amazing at or things you might want address or work on to change.

I know how to maintain my happiness. *

I believe that I can learn skills to increase my happiness. *

I have good work-life balance. *

I hardly ever feel stressed. *

I feel good about myself. *

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

I can calm myself down after an upsetting experience. *

I stay present in every moment. *

I know what matters most to me. *

I voluntarily engage in behavior to benefit others. *

I have meaningful relationships with others. *

I eat foods that support both my body and my mind. *

I put my needs before others.*

When I set goals I achieve them.*

I put my health before other peoples feelings*

When I talk to myself its 80% positive and uplifting my day.

My daily actions are 100% controllable

When I am stressed it is because I have lost some sort of control in my life*

When I have lost control in any aspect of my life it leads me to behaviors I regret after.*

I notice when I exercise regularly that I have better days consistently

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

I notice when I am eating healthy I have more energy and a better mood

I have much better days when I am controlling the things I can and letting go of the things I can't

I am really ready to put in the effort to increase my happiness. *

There are no right or wrong answers here. Go back and look at your answers and think about your core values. Do see any patterns that come up with a certain low answer or high answer to a question and how they relate back to your core values?

We struggle in our lives for many reasons, some we can control and other we can not. If we can find what our core values are and how to live within those values we see our lives take on a much more powerful and happy path.

Keep your core values written down and keep a copy with you in your purse or wallet. This will help you over the next few weeks as you keep thinking about your core values and are you living these values. I also notice that having my core values on me that when I start to fall away from those values that it reminds me that I am not doing something that will make me happy in the long run. We are human and not perfect! We never fail we either succeed or learn! So if you have times that you slip DO NOT BEAT YOURSELF UP!!!! If you slip it shows how far you have already come to changing and improving your life. Once you learn something you can truly never take a step back you have already leveled up to a better version of yourself!

"Who Am I?" Your Core and Personal Values

Daily I want you to think about your core values and your actions.

I also want you to journal each day for at least 5 minutes.

Last I want you to build on that foundation to make it unbreakable. I want you to start a foundation stack! I want you to write down 50 things about yourself that make you amazingly you! I do not expect you to do this all at once... start with as many as you can right now and then add to it daily!

Your Core Values are the foundation that everything else is built on

My future is build on that foundation and the actions my amazing self
takes daily.

