

How to Define Your Personal Values

Explore this Article ■ [Discovering Your Values](#) ■ [Assessing Your Value Alignment](#)
■ [Incorporating Your Values in Your Life and Career](#) ■ [Questions & Answers](#) ■ [Tips and Warnings](#)
■ [References](#)

Co-authored by Guy Reichard 🌱, Danielle Blinka, MA, MPA , and 35 contributors

Last Updated: May 6, 2021

Knowing your personal values will help you find fulfillment and direction in life. Your values can act like a compass, guiding you to life and career choices that give you meaning. When you have a choice to make or feel stuck, examining your values and staying true to them will help you get on the right path. You can discover your personal values by doing the following activities that reveal what's important to you. Once you discover your personal values, you can use them as a framework to redesign your life. This will help you create a life and career that are aligned with your values.

Part 1

Part 1 of 3: Discovering Your Values



1 List the things that are most important to you in life. While you might not think of them as values, you likely have a few things that you care about most in your life, like your family and friends. Take 5-10 minutes to think about what you believe is important in life and write these things down. Try to think of at least 5 things.^[1]

- For instance, you might write, "My family, being creative, helping others, being kind to animals, and learning new things."



2 Identify 3-5 experiences where you truly felt alive and engaged. When you're doing something that's important to you, it's easy to lose yourself in the moment. Think about the times in your life when you've felt this way. Keep in mind that these experiences don't need to be "happy" to be engaging and enlivening. Then, ask yourself what made the experience fulfilling to figure out which value it might reflect.^[2]

- You could write, "When I helped my friend Amy after her accident," "When I won a service award at school," and "When I fostered a litter of kittens."
- Next, examine why you felt alive while helping your friend Amy. You may have enjoyed feeling helpful, but you might also realize that you had to get creative in finding activities you could do together during her recovery, which felt exciting.



3 **Imagine what you want people to say about you on your 80th birthday.** This activity lets you look back on your life to decide how you want to live. Picture yourself celebrating 8 decades on Earth and all that you've accomplished. Then, decide what this might suggest about your values in life. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who is at my party?
- What do people love about me?
- How have I impacted people's lives?
- What have I accomplished in life?
- What do your answers to the previous questions say about your values?

EXPERT TIP



GUY REICHARD
Life Coach

Expert Trick: Another exercise you can do to find your values is describing your perfect day or week. What activities would you do? Which people would you see and be with? This thought experiment can help you find out what aspects of your life are the most important to you.



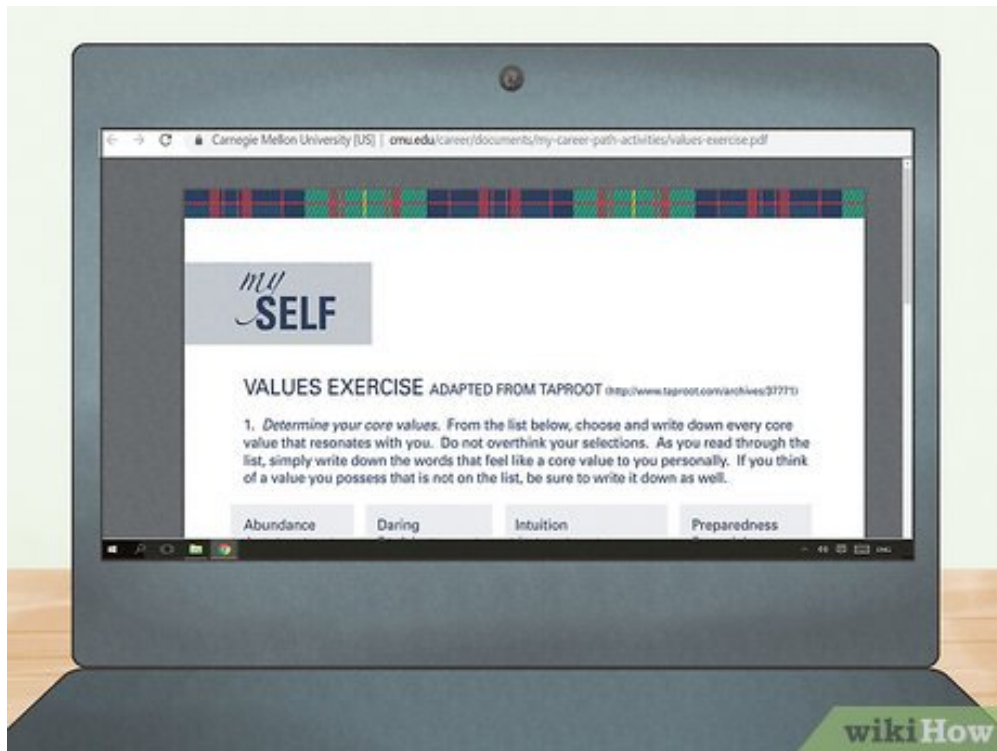
4 Think about what you admire in other people to discover your values. First, identify 2 or 3 people who you admire, such as family members, friends, leaders, celebrities, or fictional characters. Then, figure out what you admire about them, such as their accomplishments or talents. Next, decide what values they might reflect from your perspective. These are likely personal values that you hold.^[3]

- For example, you might admire Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. for his courage, commitment to standing up for what is right, and selflessness.



5 List the things you really want in life. Fold a piece of paper in half or create 2 columns in a word document. On the left side of your page, write down your answers to the questions below. On the right side of the page, write down what each entry on your list might show about your values. Your list will probably be really long, but that's a good thing because it gives you more ways to learn about yourself.

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What do you want to be in life or your career?
- What things do you hope to have?
- What do you hope to experience?
- How do you want to spend your time?
- What are your goals and aspirations?



6 Use a values inventory list to decide what's important to you. A values inventory consists of a list of values that you can review. Circle or write down the values that you identify with. Then, pick out the top 10 values on your list to figure out what's most important to you.^[4]

- For instance, you can use this list here: <https://www.cmu.edu/career/documents/my-career-path-activities/values-exercise.pdf>



7 Rank the top 10 core values that you've identified. After you've done 1 or more activities to reveal your values, compile a list of the top 10 that are most important to you. Then, rank these values from 1-10, with number 1 being the value most important to you. Use this list to help you make choices for your life and career.

- It's okay for your values and their ranking to change over time. You're always learning, growing, and changing, so it's natural for some values to change.

Part 2 of 3: Assessing Your Value Alignment



1 Rate how your life is aligned with each value on a scale of 1-10. Start at the top of your list and work your way down. Think about how each value is reflected in your life and how closely you follow it. If you feel this value is fully expressed, give yourself a 10. However, if you don't see this value at all in your life, give yourself a 1.

- For example, let's say you value artistic expression. You might give yourself a 10 for artistic expression if you make art, learn about art, go to local art museums, and have a few art prints that you love. However, you might only give yourself a 1 if you have a few books about art but don't really include it in your life.



2 Determine if your career is aligned with each value using a scale of 1-10. Ideally, you'll express your values through your career choice so that you're fulfilled in your life and work. Think about how your job or career might express each value. Give it a 10 if you feel like your career reflects the value, but give it a 1 if it doesn't.

- For example, let's say you value helping people. If you work at a local nonprofit, you might give yourself a 10 for helping people. On the other hand, if you have a job where you don't interact directly with people, you might only give yourself a 3, which might make you feel unfulfilled.



3 Look for values that you aren't currently expressing in your life. After you rate your career and your life based on your values, identify the values you hold but aren't incorporating into your life. These are areas you can work on improving in order to feel happier and more fulfilled. Additionally, it'll help you find more meaning in your activities.

- Make a list of the values you want to incorporate into your life more. Use this list as you start to make changes to your life.

Part 3 of 3: Incorporating Your Values in Your Life and Career



1 **Imagine what your ideal life would look like.** Think about who you'd be if you were fully expressing your values. Where would you want to live? What type of work would you do? How would you spend your free time? Make sure your choices are aligned with the personal values you've identified.^[5]

- For example, you might decide that in your ideal life you'd be helping people get fit through dance. You might imagine yourself living in a big city on the coast, teaching cardio dance classes at a gym, and going to the beach with friends in your spare time. Additionally, you might decide you want to own several pets because you love animals.
- You can even narrow this down to your ideal week or day. What would you be doing throughout the week? Who would you be spending time with?^[6]

Tip: Try to picture images of your ideal life to help you figure out what you want most. Then, look for ways you can make those images your reality.



2 Identify careers that fit with your personal values. Finding a career that fits your personal values helps you find meaning and purpose in life. Think about the types of tasks you might enjoy doing on a daily basis, what type of environment you'd want to work in, and who you'd like to work with. Then, look for a career that reflects these values.^[7]

- For instance, let's say you want to help people in your community and do community impact projects. Careers that have these qualities might include nonprofit work, government and political jobs, social work, urban planning, and public health.



3 Make a list of actions you can take to start living your ideal life. Brainstorm 3-5 things you can do to start living your best life. Break down your list into steps that are easy to complete. Then, pick 1 thing that you can do today. Going forward, choose 1 small thing each day that you can do to start aligning your life and career with your values.

- Over time, you should find that your life is more aligned with your values. This process can be slow or quick, depending on what's comfortable for you.



Community Q&A

Question

How do values determine your goals?



Tom De Backer
Top Answerer

If for example you think all people should be treated equally, you might set a personal goal to diversify your circle of friends to include a blind person, or a social goal to go and help at a homeless shelter. If you think all children have a right to an education, and you're good at maths, you might look for math tutoring opportunities in your area. If you value financial independence, you might set yourself a goal to achieve a promotion to a higher position.

Helpful 40 Not Helpful 2

Question

In a nutshell, what are values?



Community Answer

Values are emotional states that are the most important for you to experience. The best way to determine your values is to ask the following question: What are the most important things in my life, business, relationship, appearance, etc.? However, make sure you understand the difference between "means" and "ends." For example: If you say that the most important thing in your life is to have a ton of money, you don't actually want to have a ton of paper with dead presidents on it, you want the feelings you can experience with that money, as in freedom, security and happiness.

Helpful 43 Not Helpful 4

Question

If I value something, but do not implement it, is it actually what I value?



Cecilia Flores
Top Answerer

Not really. If you say you value honesty, love, loyalty, and trustworthiness then you go and cheat on your partner and they find out and you try to cover it with a lie, then those values clearly aren't important to you. That was an extreme case, but I just wanted to show you that many values go hand-in-hand. If you value something but don't put it into play, it's no longer a value. It's an expectation you set for how others should treat you and that's not fair if you're not returning the same.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 3

Question

What's the difference between values and personality traits?



Community Answer

Values are what you want to do and what's important to you. Traits are what you have as part of your personality or makeup (e.g., kindness, honesty, shyness, extroversion, etc.). You may not hold true to your values, but you have your traits regardless.

Helpful 4 Not Helpful 0



Tips

- It's possible that your values can change as you grow as a person. If you start feeling stuck in life, repeat this process to find out if you have new personal values that have emerged.

References

1. ↑ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/201811/6-ways-discover-and-choose-your-core-values>
2. ↑ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/201811/6-ways-discover-and-choose-your-core-values>
3. ↑ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/201811/6-ways-discover-and-choose-your-core-values>
4. ↑ <https://www.cmu.edu/career/documents/my-career-path-activities/values-exercise.pdf>
5. ↑ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201205/personal-growth-how-align-your-values-and-your-life>
6. ↑ Guy Reichard. Life Coach. Expert Interview. 19 March 2020.
7. ↑ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201205/personal-growth-how-align-your-values-and-your-life>

About This Article



Co-authored by:
Guy Reichard
Life Coach

This article was co-authored by [Guy Reichard](#) and by wikiHow staff writer, [Danielle Blinka, MA, MPA](#). Guy Reichard is an Executive Life Coach and the Founder of HeartRich Coaching & Training, a professional life coaching and inner leadership training provider based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He works with people to create more meaning, purpose, well-being, and fulfillment in their lives. Guy has over 10 years of personal growth coaching and resilience training experience, helping clients enhance and transform their inner worlds, so they can be a more positive and powerful influence on those they love and lead. He is an Adler Certified Professional Coach (ACPC), and is accredited by the International Coach Federation. He earned a BA in Psychology from York University in 1997 and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from York University in 2000. This article has been viewed 406,369 times.

★★★★★
20 votes - 95%

Co-authors: **35**
Updated: **May 6, 2021**
Views: **406,369**

Categories: [Personal Development](#)

<https://www.wikihow.com/Define-Your-Personal-Values>