



Clarify Your Values

A Guide to Understanding What Drives You

– So You Can Build Your Life, Your Way.

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Introduction

If you ever feel like life is happening to you, like the days run you instead of you running them, it may be because you are making decisions without a clear compass. **That compass is your values.**

Your values are the principles that matter most. They guide how you think, act, and choose. When you know them, you stop living reactively and start living deliberately, shaping your days around what truly matters to you. This isn't about chasing one grand purpose. It's about uncovering the real, tangible priorities that already guide your life and learning how to trust them. Once you are clear on your values, you can begin to live with purpose in a way that feels steady and true.

Inside this guide, you will find reflection exercises designed to help you clarify your values. Take them one at a time, or set aside 20 minutes to work through a few. There is no rush. Clarity comes from reflection, not speed. The more attention you give this work, the more it will give back, supporting your daily choices and your long-term direction.

Once you have clarified what values really are and started to see which ones matter most to you, the next step is to **define them**. Clarifying gives you understanding; defining gives you ownership. In the free ***How To Define Your Core Values Guide***, (*available in the members only area*) you will take what you have uncovered here and translate it into your own words, narrowing down to your core 3–5 values and shaping them into practical tools for daily decisions. Clarify first, then define, together they give you both the insight and the direction you need to begin living with purpose. [**Become a free Inspirational Guidance member here**](#)

Contents: Complete Values Clarification Process

1. [Characteristics of Values](#)
2. [Reflection Exercise: Discovering Your Core Values](#)
3. [Step 1 – Understand values](#) – Know what they are and why they matter
4. [Avoid common traps](#) – Distinguish between inherited, aspirational, and authentic values
5. [Step 2 – Gather clues](#) – Use multiple exercises to identify patterns
6. [Step 3 – Identify Your non-negotiables](#) – Rank your top values
7. [Step 4 – Map to actions](#) – Define what each value looks like daily
8. [Step 5 – Check For Conflicts](#) – Decide in advance which takes priority
9. [Step 6 – Test in real life](#) – Run experiments and practice scenarios
10. [Step 7 – Filter decisions](#) – Use values as a yes/no guide
11. [Step 8 – Navigate obstacles](#) – Plan for implementation challenges
12. [Step 9 – Review regularly](#) – Maintain alignment as you grow

The Main Characteristics of Values

When we talk about values, we often confuse them with preferences, attitudes, or fleeting feelings. But values run deeper. They are the core principles that guide our decisions, shape our behaviour, and help us define who we are because values have certain unique characteristics that set them apart from everything else.

Here are the three characteristics of values – and why they matter.

1. Emotion Based Values

Values are not neutral ideas. They are tied closely to our emotions. Values are powerful because they stir something in us that goes far beyond surface-level opinion. Think about the intense anger you feel when someone betrays your trust. That isn't just frustration. It's the emotional weight of having your values, e.g. loyalty or honesty, violated.

2. Action Related Values

Not only do our values inform us and others about what matters but they also move us into action. When your values are strong, motivation isn't necessary. Values like status or independence will not only work towards helping us choose the goals we focus on, but will also drive us to take action towards achieving them. Values provide you with the passion you need to power your direction and the intensity of your behaviour.

3. Inherent Values

When you truly find your values you may discover they have always been with you in one form or another. This is because values don't change like preferences where we choose whether to follow them or not. If honesty is a core value for you, then you are not just honest with your family and not at work (or vice versa). Honesty will matter in all areas of your life.

The Hierarchy of Values

You may have 5 values or you may have 10, however many you have you will find that some are more important to you than others. You may have values that are non-negotiable like flexibility and family or values like money that are important but not as important as family.

How does this help? Your hierarchy can help you with decision making. For example if you are offered a job that involves a lot of travel and a lot of extra money but you have to give up working from home and you have to work in an office, you can use your values to help you decide whether to accept. This new job means travel will take you away from your family. Working in an office also means less time with family and less flexibility in the way you work. The money is a bonus but you are financially comfortable. Your values will mean this job offer is automatically declined.

This ranking system is why values are so personal. It's not just which values we hold, but how we organise them that defines our character and direction.

The Trade-Offs Involved With Values

Every value comes with a cost. To hold one value highly often means giving less weight to another. For example, if stability or reliability is a deeply held value then flexibility or freedom will have less importance in your life.

Swapping that around, if flexibility and spontaneity are essential values for you, anything that involves consistency and stability will take a back seat

This balancing act is unavoidable. To value one thing is to devalue another — and those trade-offs shape the way we live our lives.

Why This Matters

When you step back, these characteristics show that values are not just another part of personal development. They raise profound, almost philosophical questions:

- What matters most?
- What is worth pursuing?
- What kind of person do I want to become?

In many ways, values are the foundation of identity. They are what make you *you*. By understanding how values work and recognizing the trade-offs and hierarchies at play, you can make clearer choices, live with more intention, and design a life that feels truly your own.

Reflection Exercise: Discovering Your Core Values

Use the characteristics of values as a guide to reflect on what really matters to you.

Set aside 15–20 minutes with a notebook or journal.

Step 1. Emotion Based Values

Think of a time you felt a strong emotional reaction, e.g. anger, pride, joy, or disappointment.

- What value was being honoured or violated in that moment?
- Write down at least two values connected to those experiences.

Step 2. Values as Motivation

Ask yourself: *What gets me out of bed in the morning?*

- Which values give me energy and drive (e.g., achievement, freedom, connection)?
- Which values leave me feeling flat or unmotivated when they are missing?

Step 3. Inherent Values

Choose one value you believe is important (e.g., honesty, kindness, creativity).

- How does it show up in your work?
- How does it show up in your relationships?
- How does it show up when you are alone?

If it doesn't apply across contexts, is it really a core value, or more of a preference?

Step 4. Values as Standards

Think about how you judge yourself and others.

- What do you admire in people?
- What frustrates or disappoints you about people?
- How do these judgments reveal your underlying values?

Step 5. Rank Your Values

List your top five values in order of importance.

- Why is your number one value at the top?
- What decisions in your life reflect this ranking?

Step 6. Recognize Trade-Offs

Every value has a cost. Look at your list of top five values.

- Which values do they naturally conflict with?
- What trade-offs are you willing to make?
- What trade-offs feel too costly?

Step 7. Integration

Finish with these two questions:

- *What matters most to me right now?*
- *How can I align one daily choice with my top value this week?*
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Why Clarifying Your Values Matters

Direction beats motivation: When you know your values, you have a reliable decision-making filter even on days when motivation is low.

Less overthinking: You stop analysing every option to death because your values tell you which fits best.

Fewer regrets: Decisions based on your values feel right long after the moment has passed.

Greater self-trust: You stop second-guessing yourself because you know why you made the choice.

Step 1: Understand What Values Are (and Aren't)

Values are:

- Principles you choose to live by
- Guides for behaviour, not abstract ideals
- Flexible enough to grow with you

Values are not:

- Goals (goals are what you aim to achieve; values guide how you achieve them)
- Random "nice-to-haves" from a list in a book
- What you think you should care about because others do

Common Values Traps to Avoid

Before diving into exercises, watch out for these common pitfalls:

Inherited Values – Values passed down from family or culture that you've never questioned. Ask yourself: "Do I choose this value, or was it chosen for me?"

Aspirational Values – Values you wish mattered to you but don't actually drive your behavior. Be honest about what actually motivates you, not what sounds good.

Should Values – Values based on societal expectations rather than authentic desires. Notice when you use phrases like "I should care about..." – this often signals a should value rather than a genuine one.

Step 2: Gather Clues From Your Own Life

Your values are already showing up in your best and worst moments. We just have to bring them into focus.

Exercise: The Peak & Pit Method

Peak moments – Write down three times you felt proud, alive, or deeply content.

- What were you doing?
- Who were you with?
- Why did it matter to you?

Pit moments – Write down three times you felt frustrated, drained, or "not yourself."

- What caused that feeling?
- Which needs or principles were being ignored?

Look for themes in both lists. Peaks reveal values you want to nurture; pits reveal values you need to protect.

Exercise: Values Archaeology

Examine your spending and time logs for the past month. Create two columns:

- Where do you actually spend your money?
- Where do you actually spend your time?

Often there's a revealing gap between stated values and where you invest your resources. This gap shows you either values you are neglecting or "should values" that aren't actually important to you.

Exercise: Role Model Analysis

List 3-5 people you deeply admire (they can be people you know personally or public figures).

For each person, write down:

- What specific qualities draw you to them?
- What do they do that you wish you did more of?
- How do they handle challenges or decisions?

The qualities you admire in others often reflect values you want to express more fully in your own life.

Exercise: The Eulogy Test

Write what you would want people to say about how you lived at your funeral. Focus on character and impact rather than achievements.

This exercise cuts through superficial answers and gets to deeper values quickly. What matters when you imagine your life from that final perspective?

Exercise: Values Under Pressure Test

Think of 2–3 times when you were stressed, rushed, or under significant pressure.

- What did you default to?
- What did you protect or prioritize?
- What did you sacrifice first?

Crisis moments often reveal authentic core values more clearly than comfortable times, because they show what you instinctively protect when everything can't be preserved.

Step 3: Identify Your Non-Negotiables

These are the values you will not compromise on, even when it's inconvenient. They're the backbone of a life that feels like yours.

Exercise: The Five Test

Circle 5 recurring themes from your exercises above (e.g., freedom, creativity, kindness, growth, honesty).

For each, write one sentence beginning with: "For me, [value] means..."

Example: "For me, creativity means making space each week to create something new without worrying if it's 'useful'."

Exercise: Values Hierarchy

Once you have your top 5 values, rank them by asking: "If I could only honor one value today, which would it be?" Then: "Of the remaining four, which is most important?" Continue until you have a clear 1-5 ranking.

This hierarchy becomes crucial for making tough decisions where values conflict.

Step 4: Define What Each Value Looks Like in Action

Values need to be lived, not just named. The clearer your actions, the easier your choices will be.

Exercise: Value-to-Action Mapping

Create a table with three columns: Value | Daily Action | Example Choice

Examples:

- **Creativity** | Spend 30 minutes each morning writing or drawing | Say no to an extra meeting so I can keep my creative block free
- **Health** | Prepare lunch the night before | Skip late-night scrolling to get enough sleep
- **Family** | Have dinner together without devices | Turn down weekend work requests

Exercise: Values in Relationships Mapping

Create a chart of your 5–7 closest relationships. For each person, note:

- Which of your values do they reflect or support?
- Which values do they challenge or conflict with?
- How does this relationship energize or drain you?

This reveals both sources of values alignment and potential areas of growth or conflict in your relationships.

Step 5: Check for Conflicts and Prioritise

Some values will compete. That's normal — the key is to consciously decide which takes priority when they clash.

Exercise: Value Conflict Review

1. List two values that sometimes pull in opposite directions (e.g., security vs. adventure, family vs. career growth)
2. Think of a real-life scenario where they conflicted
3. Decide which you'd choose if the same conflict came up tomorrow — and why
4. Create a principle for handling this conflict in the future

Exercise: The 80-Year-Old Self Letter

Write a letter from your 80-year-old self to your current self about what really mattered in life. What would your older, wiser self say about:

- Which values to prioritize?
- What conflicts weren't worth the stress?

- What you wish you'd spent more time on?

This provides perspective beyond current circumstances and immediate pressures.

Step 6: Test Your Values in Real Life

You only know a value is real when you see yourself living by it, even when it costs you something.

Experiment: One-Week Value Challenge

1. Pick one value to focus on this week
2. Each day, make at least one choice that honors it — even if it's small
3. At the end of the week, reflect: Did living this value feel right? Did it energize you or feel forced?

Exercise: Real-World Application Scenarios

Practice applying your values to these common decision points:

Career Decision: You are offered a promotion with higher pay but longer hours and more stress. Walk through your values hierarchy to make the decision.

Relationship Choice: A friend consistently cancels plans last-minute. How do your values guide your response?

Money Decision: You have extra money to spend. How do your values influence whether you save, spend on experiences, give to charity, or invest in a skill?

Time Management: Your weekend is free. How do your values guide how you spend these precious hours?

Step 7: Make Values Your Decision Filter

From now on, run new opportunities through this quick filter:

1. Does this align with one or more of my top values?
2. Does it compromise any of my top values?
3. If it compromises a value, am I willing to make that trade-off?

If the answer to #1 is "no" and #2 is "yes," the decision is easy — it's a no.

Step 8: Navigate Implementation Obstacles

Aligning your life with your values isn't always straightforward. Here's how to handle common challenges:

When Values Conflict with Job/Family Expectations:

- Start with small changes rather than dramatic overhauls
- Communicate your values clearly to help others understand your choices
- Look for creative compromises that honor both your values and important relationships

During the Transition Period:

- Expect some discomfort as you shift from old patterns to values-based living
- Celebrate small wins rather than waiting for perfect alignment
- Be patient with yourself and others as they adjust to changes in your behavior

Dealing with Guilt or Fear:

- Remember that living by your values ultimately serves everyone better than living inauthentically

- Start with lower-stakes decisions to build confidence
- Seek support from people who share or respect your values

Step 9: Create a Values Maintenance System

Values aren't fixed forever. They evolve as you do. Here's how to stay aligned:

Monthly Values Check-In

Ask yourself:

- Where in my life do I feel most aligned right now?
- Where do I feel resistance or resentment?
- Which value is at play in each case?
- What one adjustment could improve my alignment?

Annual Values Review

- Revisit your values exercises
- Notice what's changed in your priorities
- Update your values hierarchy if needed
- Adjust your daily actions to reflect any shifts

Warning Signs You are Drifting

Watch for these signals that you may be moving away from your values:

- Consistent Sunday scaries or Monday dread
- Feeling like you are living someone else's life
- Regular resentment about how you spend your time
- Making decisions you later regret

- Feeling energized by other people's lives but not your own

Everyday Example

You are offered a promotion with a bigger salary but longer hours. Your values are family, health, and creativity. The job would compromise all three. The old you might have said yes because "it's the logical next step."

The values-aligned you says no, because you are no longer living by logic alone; you are living by your compass.


Final Thought

Clarifying your values isn't a one-time exercise. It's the foundation of self-authorship and the first step toward living with purpose. The more often you use them to guide your choices, the more your days will feel like they belong to you.

The goal isn't perfection. It's progress toward a life that feels authentically yours, where your daily choices reflect what genuinely matters to you. Start with one exercise, make one values-based decision today, and build from there.

The next important step after clarifying your values is to define them
so you can use them daily

How to Define Your Core Values
(and Actually Use Them in Daily Decisions)



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