

Personal Values Overview

Discover what's really most important to you personally and use that to motivate yourself and others to be more inspired, productive and satisfied

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Personal values overview

1. Why are personal values so vital?

They're vital because they can be used to motivate and inspire yourself and others to be more productive and innovative. They can help you improve performance, achieve goals and help others while feeling great satisfaction. Personal values provide clarity, insight and vision that can change your expectations of yourself and others. They help you deeply understand what's most important to you personally, which is often a surprise. They provide insights to recognize opportunities and the courage to act in ways that you would not previously consider. Understanding personal values makes people aware of how often they violate their own values, the values of others and the potential negative consequences of both.

2. What are personal values?

Personal Values are standards or principles that describe what is most important to you, personally. They influence what you believe is or isn't worthwhile as well as your thinking, feeling, behavior and results. The following are examples of personal values.



Personal values can also be short phrases like "Making a difference" or "Doing the right thing."

The most abstract values like "Inner peace," "Happiness" and "Feeling good" are almost always the most important over the long term. Objects are not values even though we may value them.

Our choices of values are influenced by our genetics and our life experiences in family, schools, relationships, religion, and other contexts. Values and their importance can change over time as a result of significant emotional experiences and life transitions.

3. There is no standard list or standard definition of individual values.

What some people consider a value may not be a value to others. There may be dictionary definitions of each value, but how people define and use those values can vary significantly. The challenge is to first understand what your values mean to you. Then assume that others will often not fully understand what you mean by your values unless you tell them.

When a person violates their own personal values they typically feel guilty. When their values are violated by others or by systems or events inside or outside the organization, it can cause anger, stress and conflict.

4. Personal values are like an organization's "Key performance indicators."

"Key performance indicators" of an organization are standards for measuring progress and have a major influence on decision-making. They identify what's most important to the organization for survival and success. Personal values are also "key performance indicators." They are an individual's standards for measuring personal progress and have a major influence on decision-making. They identify what's most important to an individual for their survival and success.

5. When people take action to get their personal values satisfied, almost without exception the results improve their operations, help the people they work with and support the organization's goals.

Almost always, what's good for personal values is good for the organization.

The thinking skills you use in your organization to achieve your "key performance indicators" are the same skills needed to satisfy your personal values. All you have to do is discover what those values are and what they mean to you personally.

6. Values can be an extraordinarily effective mainstream decision-making tool involving the most important organizational and personal decisions.

Examples of situations that can benefit:

Problem-solving and creating opportunities involving strategy, operations, technology, policy and administration

Self-motivation and motivation of others

Improving communications and relationships

Managing anger

Selecting or leaving jobs, bosses, colleagues, subordinates, careers, and companies

For example, if you had a choice, would you stay on a job very long if you could not get what you want of "Happiness, Inner peace or Feeling good," or something like that? Most people would leave at the first opportunity. People are motivated to satisfy values like "Integrity, Respect and Accomplishment" because they contribute to and enable the satisfaction of values like "Happiness, Inner peace and Feeling good." It's why values like "Happiness, Inner peace and Feeling good" are typically the total effect of all the other values of an individual and therefore, their most important value over the long term.

When you discover your personal values you'll be able to do a values analysis of almost every work situation in 10-30 seconds and make better decisions concerning what to do. The return on Investment of those 10-30 seconds is enormous.

7. "Values satisfaction" is like food for our emotional health and effectiveness.

It gives us the motivation, inspiration and energy to be productive, creative and support others ... and sustain the capability to do that effectively over the long term.

8. People will get motivated and committed to achieving the goals of the organization when they believe (consciously or unconsciously) that their personal values will get satisfied.

So it's in the leader's best interests to provide opportunities for themselves, their direct reports, others in their organization and their customers to get their personal values satisfied.

9. It's much easier for a person to compromise their values at “appropriate times” if they understand their values. It can be an ethical strength.

Appropriate times means:

- It's the right thing to do and is worth the personal sacrifice.
- It will improve the situation for the organization and the people involved.
- Compromising in the near-term will get values more satisfied in the long-term.

Understanding values helps a person make compromises without feeling guilt or regret. That's because they're making decisions with their “eyes open” and fully understand the short-term and long-term opportunities and consequences.

Understanding values increases thinking and behavioral adaptability. It helps people stay grounded in challenging situations and be more at peace with their decisions. It can help them recognize and maintain ethical boundaries.

10. A person who lies may highly value “Honesty” or “Integrity.” A person who doesn't complete the jobs they start may highly value “Pride” or “Accomplishment.”

The problem is, they are violating their own values and that can cause feelings of guilt. When guilt piles up, it can lead to serious personal issues. So bad behavior does not mean the absence of certain values, the presence of bad values or no values at all. It just means bad behavior.

11. Values are measurable in practical ways, although not to decimal accuracy.

If you ask a person to what degree in a scale of 1 to 4 they are getting their values of "Accomplishment" or "Happiness" satisfied on their job, they can almost always answer easily, confidently and accurately.

For example, think of your present job and respond to the following two questions.

- To what degree is the value of "Respect" or “Accomplishment” getting satisfied in your present job? Respond with a number of 1-4 where:
 - 4 = high
 - 3 = medium
 - 2 = low
 - 1 = violated (which is lower than low and is probably associated with anger or feeling hurt)
- Ask the same question for the value of "Happiness," "Feeling good" or “Inner peace.”

Work is wonderful when our most important values are getting satisfied. Work is more likely to be stressful and dissatisfying when our values are not getting satisfied.

12. Values are neither good nor bad. They're neutral.

People have behaved in wonderful ways to satisfy their value of "accomplishment." Those same people at times may have behaved in terrible ways to satisfy their value of "accomplishment," for example, by lying or selling defective product. It's not the personal value that's good or bad, it's the behaviors. When a person attacks another person's values, the other person usually believes their "essence" has been attacked. It feels like they're being called a bad person. The result is that the attacker has destroyed their ability to influence the other person. The alternatives are "You're a good person and that was bad behavior." "You're a good child and that was bad behavior." not, "You're a bad child."

13. An organization's values can be most effectively developed and put into practice when people first understand the relationship of their personal values to organizational values.

Inspiration and motivation can become systemic when there's mutual support between personal and organizational values, organizational culture and goals.

14. People identify abstract personal values like Happiness, Feeling good, Inner peace and others as the values most important to them over the long term, almost without exception.

Yet many people do not expect to get those kinds of values satisfied at work and some leaders dismiss them as not important. It's not unusual to hear comments like, "We're not here to make people happy. We're here to increase earnings per share."

Values like Happiness, Feeling good and Inner peace mean the same thing for some people and have very different meanings for others.

15. Every person has many values. Those values often have different levels of importance in different contexts.

Examples of contexts are:

- Work
- Family
- Relationships

Can you imagine how people would use "Love" as a value in the context of Family but will rarely use it in the context of Work? On the other hand, the Founder of Southwest Airlines often mentioned "Love" and "Spirituality" as values at work.

16. Values and beliefs can be thought of as very different

Beliefs are our perceptions of how the world functions. They influence how we think and behave to get our values satisfied. For example, imagine one person who believes that "business executives are just interested in making money." Imagine another person who believes that "business executives are doing the best they can to make a positive difference in the lives of their customers, employees and community." You can probably imagine how differently those two people would trust and behave towards business executives.

Now consider two people who have "relationships" as an important value. One believes they are great at developing and maintaining relationships. The second person believes they do that poorly. "I do that poorly" is a "limiting belief" that is

more likely to influence behaviors in ways that prevent the satisfaction of the value of “relationships.” For example: Avoid opportunities to meet new people.

We all have “limiting beliefs” that affect our behaviors in ways that make it difficult for us to get our values satisfied. **When we discover our most important values and think about why they aren’t getting satisfied, we often discover our limiting beliefs.** That in turn may provide opportunities to change those beliefs. Significant emotional experiences and life transitions can also cause belief changes.

17. Some values are more important than other values for a specific person in specific contexts

The level of importance can be just as important as the values themselves in the way decision-making and behaviors are affected.

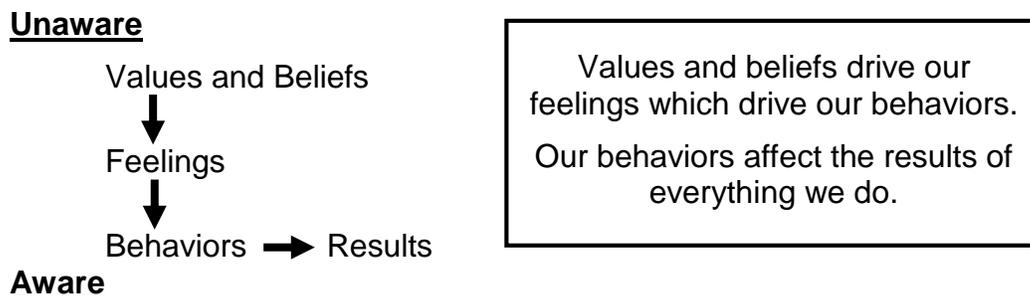
For example, imagine two people with the same 4 values in their values hierarchies as shown below. Their most important value is at the top and least important value is at the bottom. The person at the left has **Honesty** at the top and the person at the right has **Relationships** at the top. The other two values are at the same level of importance. Which person is more likely to lie to help a friend?



The answer is the person to the right with “Relationships” at the top. As a result, the person with “Honesty” at the top may not trust this person, might accuse him or her of a terrible deed. The one who lied might be incredulous and insist that it was the right thing to do, and they’d do it again. **They may have all those conflicts even though they have the same values.**

18. People are less aware of their values and beliefs than feelings and behaviors.

The chart below shows generally how aware people are of their values, beliefs, feelings and behaviors and the implications. We are most aware of our behaviors, which are at the bottom of the list, because they are more concrete. We can see what people do and hear what they say. We are less aware of our feelings. Did you ever have someone say, “Gee, why are you so angry?” and you reply, “*WHO’S ANGRY?*” only to realize, of course, you’re angry. People tend to be quite unaware of their beliefs and their most important values.

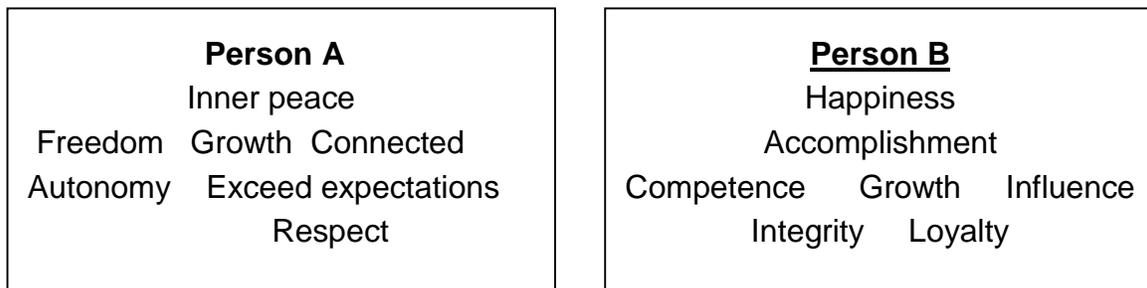


19. It's often difficult for people to talk about their values and beliefs, except in a general and impersonal way, because they are unaware of them.

Therefore, most attention is usually placed on getting disciplined about changing behaviors, with the hope that beliefs and feelings about certain things will change.

This approach sometimes works but it is more difficult and often ineffective. When there's a crisis, people are more likely to resume old behaviors because they're more aligned with their values and beliefs that have not changed. Behavior is more likely to start changing when a person's beliefs change. When leaders and professionals pay attention to challenging and creating shifts in people's long-held beliefs, they're more likely to get changes in behaviors that are sustainable.

20. The relative importance of an individual's personal values over the long term can be represented in a useful way by a cause-effect values hierarchy that is like an organization chart



The values hierarchies for the two real people above show their 7 most important values. The top values, Inner peace and Happiness are like the CEO of their values. They are the most important values for them personally, over the long term. Inner peace and Happiness can have different meanings for some people and the same meanings for others. These two values are what these people want more than anything else at the end of the day. They are the total effect or result they get when the other values in their hierarchies are satisfied. When the bottom level of the hierarchy gets satisfied, it causes the satisfaction of the next higher level, which causes the satisfaction of the next higher level and so on. The opportunity and the challenge is to do what it takes to get the lower level values satisfied so they have a better chance of causing their top value to get satisfied.

21. Values are rarely in conflict with each other or cause problems. Values are typically complementary, working as mutually supportive partners. They are highly likely to have cause-effect relationships. It's just that they need different degrees of attention at different times and in different contexts. It's the people making negative judgments about the differences in values and the different people involved that causes the problems.