

# Discovering Personal Values

## An Exercise for Leaders

If you're having a hard time finding a personal, compelling reason to achieve the goals and objectives for your daily work, it may be because you haven't yet identified what is *truly important to you*. You may be pursuing what others want or expect from you out of a sense of duty, but with no real personal connection.

The exercises in the following pages will help you find clarity on what is truly important to you. You'll be able to articulate your personal core values. Just as importantly, you'll also be able to identify impostors that take your attention away from what really matters to you.

Once you can clearly state your personal values, you'll be better prepared to make your business goals and objectives personally meaningful. And when a goal becomes personally meaningful, you'll find the energy to pursue it vigorously and a renewed sense of fulfillment with every step of progress along the way.

What you write here won't be perfect. That's OK; it's expected. You'll likely revisit this exercise several times over the next weeks and months. Each time, you'll see something different to refine or clarify. It's best to use an erasable pencil and not write anything permanently in ink.

For the first iteration, set aside some time to concentrate in a place without distraction.

Let's get started.



## Step 1 — Foundational Value Brainstorm

Find a pencil with an eraser. Spend about 10 minutes writing words or short phrases that represent what might be important to you. Don't worry about ranking how important it is. And don't worry about writing the same idea more than once. You have an eraser you can use later if you need it. For now, just write down as much as you can think of in the next 10 minutes.



## Step 2 — Value Expansion

The brainstorm helped you find your most obvious values, but those aren't necessarily the ones most important to you. The questions in this exercise will help you uncover values that may be less obvious.

For each question, **first** write an answer as if you were sharing with someone who didn't know you very well.

**After you've answered** all of the questions you want to answer, reflect on each question and see what else your answers reveal as something you value. **Add any extra words and short phrases to the list you created in step 1.**

1. What would you want if you were guaranteed to get it and never have to lose it?

*Reflect: What would your life be like if you had it? How would you know? What would you feel?*

2. What would you try if you knew there were no consequences for failure?

*Reflect: What would you gain if you succeeded? What potential consequences hold you back? What would you lose if you faced those consequences?*



### 3. What is the thing that when you are doing it, you totally forget about time?

*Reflect: It's OK to think of more than one thing. What do those things have in common?*

### 4. When was the last time you cried?

*Reflect: If it was a sad moment, what was at the root of the sadness? If it was a happy moment, what was it that brought the happiness? If crying is frequent, what do those moments have in common?*

### 5. When was the last time you were angry or frustrated?

*Reflect: Who was involved, and what was their relation to you? What expectation of yours was not being met? If it happens frequently, what do those moments have in common?*



6. What would you do differently if you had **more** time?

*Reflect: How would changing that make you feel more fulfilled? What makes it important to you?*

7. What would you do differently if you had **less** time?

*Reflect: What changes did you consider but reject? How did you preserve what's important to you even with less time?*

8. If money wasn't an issue, what is the number one thing you would do regularly?

*Reflect: How would your life be different? What would you gain by doing it? What, if anything, do you substitute for that now?*



9. If you could relive one moment or experience of your life, what would it be?

*Reflect: What were you doing? Who, if anyone, was with you? What makes that experience worth reliving? If there are multiple moments, what do they have in common?*

10. What do others say you obsess over?

*Reflect: What behaviors do they observe? What makes it important to you?*





## Step 4 — Value Classification

So far you have been writing down whatever came to mind, without any filter or criteria. Now it's time to check your values to see how strongly they truly resonate with you.

In this exercise, you'll distinguish between three different kinds of values:

1. **Core Values:** These are so strong they feel like requirements to you. If you're living outside of these values, life feels wrong and unfulfilling. Violating them long enough can result in shame, embarrassment, and even depression.
2. **Chosen Values:** These are values that you have adopted as your own, and they feel personal to you. You have learned to feel fulfillment when these values are present, and you do your best to live into them.
3. **“Superficial Shoulds”:** These values may be important to members of your family, culture, background, or environment. You're not necessarily opposed to these values, but they may not personally resonate with you like your core and chosen values do. These are mostly likely to show up in your foundational brainstorm, but they can also creep into your reflections on the expansion exercises. Trying too hard to live up to these values can sometimes drain you of energy that you need to honor your core and chosen values.

Next to each item in your consolidated list of themes from step 3, identify it as either **core**, **chosen**, or **superficial**. You may find that you'll need to divide and regroup some of your themes differently as part of this process. That's OK.

Most people will identify no more than three to five themes as **core** values.

## Step 5 — Value Prioritization

Identify the top seven to ten themes that reflect your core and most important chosen values. It's not necessary to force rank them from one to ten; just make sure there's a distinction between your core values and your chosen values. Don't include any of your “superficial shoulds.”

**You now have a list of your most important values.** You'll find your greatest fulfillment and motivation when the work you're doing and the goals you're pursuing are aligned with these values.

***Bonus:** Many people find a lot of overlap among their themes. See if you can find two or three individual words that work together to encompass your entire collection of values. Knowing those two or three words is a powerful mental shorthand you can use as a personal motivational tool when making future decisions.*

# About Steve Dwire

*The Technology Leader's Professional Coach*

Before shifting my focus full-time on my own company, I spent over twenty years in corporate America. There I navigated the choppy waters of five separate mergers and acquisitions. Starting in a three-person software development team working out of a closet (yes, literally) in a local hospital, I've found my way in everything from a tiny startup to a Fortune 500 company.



I've been an **individual contributor**, and I've been a **leader of leaders**. I've grown from one skill to another, filling whatever leadership role opened up for me with frequent corporate reorganizations. Along the way, I became a **trusted voice for CEOs** as they navigated their own challenging decisions.

Contact me at [steve.dwire@northwayinsights.com](mailto:steve.dwire@northwayinsights.com).

Or visit <https://www.northwayinsights.com/apply> to find out if my coaching is right for you.

