

8 Simple Steps to Defining Your Values and Guiding Principles

“Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God’s Law and Prophets, and this is what you get.” – Matthew 7:12 – The Message

Sound decisions are anchored in core values, the deeply held beliefs or ideals that guide your thoughts and actions. When you make decisions congruent with your values, you feel satisfied; if incongruent with your values, you experience inner stress and conflict. If you know your values, you can make decisions on many fronts like how to live your life, where to work, whom to marry, and whether or not to compromise on an issue or make a change.

Do you know your values and how they affect your decisions? Think about it.

Do you know what you stand for? What you’d be willing to fight or even die for?

Let’s take a few minutes to define or confirm your personal values.

1. **Peaks**. Identify peak or high point experiences in your life where you were happiest, most satisfied, or fulfilled. What were the circumstances? Who was with you? What values were you exercising at the time?

2. **Valleys**. Identify valleys or low points in your life where you experienced inner stress or conflict. What were the circumstances? Who was with you? What values were you not exercising at the time?

3. **Selection.** Understanding the peaks and low points, select your top ten values from the list below, adapted and excerpted with permission from [MindTools](#):

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|---------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Ambition | Fitness | Positivity |
| Artistic Expression | Flexibility | Power |
| Assertiveness | Freedom | Preparedness |
| Authenticity | Friendship | Prestige |
| Balance | Fun | Professionalism |
| Belonging | Generosity | Quality |
| Celebrate | Growth | Recognition |
| Challenge | Happiness | Reliability |
| Civility | Health | Responsibility |
| Clarity | Humility | Restraint |
| Collaboration | Humor | Results-oriented |
| Commitment | Independence | Security |
| Community | Ingenuity | Self-Respect |
| Compassion | Influence | Service |
| Competency | Integrity | Simplicity |
| Competition | Intelligence | Stability |
| Conformity | Joy | Strategic |
| Contribution | Justice | Status |
| Control | Leadership | Strength |
| Courage | Learning | Success |
| Creativity | Leisure | Teamwork |
| Dependability | Location | Tolerance |
| Development | Love | Trustworthiness |
| Discipline | Loyalty | Tradition |
| Dignity | Nature | Understanding |
| Diversity | Obedience | Unity |
| Efficiency | Order | Variety |
| Empathy | Organization | Vision |
| Enthusiasm | | |

4. **Prioritize.** When choosing among options, you'll be able to know what values are most important to you.

5. **Narrow.** Whittle down your list. What are your top three or

five values? Imagine someone in an elevator asked you what your values are. Could you rattle them off in thirty seconds? Knowing, understanding, and being able to articulate your values is invaluable as a leader.

6. **Develop.** Give your values a richer context. Describe what the value looks like in action. This will help you turn the values into guiding principles.

7. **Examine.** Are you living your core values and making decisions that are congruent with them? Rate each selected value from 1 to 10, where 10 is the value fully demonstrated in your decision-making process. Where are your lowest scores? What score would you like to achieve in the future? What action steps will you take to close the gap and elevate the score?

8. **Share.** Disclose your values with a trusted confidant and ask if they see your prioritized values demonstrated in your life and decision-making. Why, or why aren't, they demonstrated? How will you adjust based on their feedback?

My top five values are love, integrity, trust, leadership, and excellence. When I've assumed new leadership positions, one of the first things I do is share my values and guiding principles, i.e., how my values look in action. I want to let people know where I stand, what I believe in, and what to expect from me. If my actions deviate from the list, I encourage the team to call me out.

My guiding principles are:

1. Integrity – Walk the talk with transparency
2. Trust – Confident expectation
3. Leadership – Positively inspire and influence
4. Excellence – Pursue distinction
5. Humor – The shortest distance between two people
6. Vision – Anticipate the future and go there
7. Results – Measure progress toward goals

8. Discipline – Bring order to chaos
9. Development – Nurture and grow skills, abilities
10. Collaborate – Develop cooperative solutions
11. Celebrate – Publicly acknowledge successes
12. Passion – Possess a burning desire to win

In sharing my values and guiding principles, people understand where I'm coming from, my decision-making motives, and actions. I modeled my approach after Jesus'. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1 to 7:27), Jesus shared his core values and guiding principles with the listeners. He established what he stood for. To make his values and guiding principles easy to understand, he summarized them with this eternal truth: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). If you value Jesus's words, your values and guiding principles will reflect them. And you'll make sound decisions that honor God and benefit you and others.

Consider

- Do you know your core values and guiding principles?
- What role do they play in your decision-making process?
- If you told someone your values, would they agree?
- Do they honor God?

Do you want to learn more? Visit my website, www.prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

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