

Values Clarification Guide

Knowing What Matters - Making Decisions That Reflect Who You Are

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Decisions are not made in a vacuum. Whether we know it or not, each choice we face is viewed through a set of values. Those things that matter most to us, that define how we want to live and who we want to be. When we are clear about our values, decisions become easier to evaluate. When we are not, we can make choices that look rational on paper, but leave us feeling uneasy or conflicted afterwards.

This tool has two parts. Part 1 is a values inventory to help identify and define the values that are important to you. This is not about a specific decision. It’s about self-knowledge.

Part 2 applies your values directly to a decision you are facing. It asks: given what I know about what matters most to me, which of the options in front of me is most aligned with who I am and who I want to be?

How to use this tool

Use this tool at Step 6 (Test Your Values) of the Decision Cycle, or whenever a decision feels harder than it should be and you want to understand why. Chapter 10 of LIFE: Our Uncertain Experiment explains what values do in a decision.

Part 1 - Values inventory. Work through the full values list. The initial selection should be generous. It is easier to cut than to add back later. Write the definition in your own words. If you cannot define a value clearly, it may not be as central as it appears.

Part 2 - Applying to a decision. Complete Part 1 first, even if you already have a sense of your values. The inventory process regularly identifies priorities that are not immediately obvious. When scoring each option, be honest about the difference between what you think you should value and what you really value.

Note. If your values score and your instinct point in different directions, do not discard the instinct. Note the tension and explore it. The gap between score and feeling is often the most informative part of this exercise.

PART 1 Values Inventory

STAGE 1 - SELECT YOUR VALUES

Read through the list below. Tick or circle every value that feels important to you. Don’t filter at this stage. If it resonates, mark it. You will narrow the list down in the next step.

Achievement and growth ☐ Accomplishment ☐ Ambition ☐ Excellence ☐ Growth ☐ Learning ☐ Mastery ☐ Perseverance ☐ Progress ☐ Success	Freedom and creativity ☐ Adventure ☐ Autonomy ☐ Creativity ☐ Expression ☐ Freedom ☐ Imagination ☐ Independence ☐ Originality ☐ Spontaneity	Connection and belonging ☐ Belonging ☐ Community ☐ Connection ☐ Family ☐ Friendship ☐ Generosity ☐ Love ☐ Loyalty ☐ Partnership
Character and integrity ☐ Accountability ☐ Authenticity ☐ Courage ☐ Fairness ☐ Honesty ☐ Integrity ☐ Justice ☐ Responsibility ☐ Trustworthiness	Contribution and purpose ☐ Compassion ☐ Contribution ☐ Empathy ☐ Impact ☐ Legacy ☐ Meaning ☐ Purpose ☐ Service ☐ Usefulness	Wellbeing and wisdom ☐ Balance ☐ Curiosity ☐ Faith ☐ Gratitude ☐ Health ☐ Open-mindedness ☐ Peace ☐ Security ☐ Wisdom

Think of two decisions you are proud of and one that still troubles you. Which values were you upholding, or setting aside?

Looking back at past decisions often tells you more about your values than any list.

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STAGE 2 - CREATE YOUR SHORTLIST

From everything you ticked in Stage 1, choose the ten values that feel most essential to you. Write them below.

1		6	
2		7	
3		8	
4		9	
5		10	

STAGE 3 - RANK YOUR TOP FIVE

From your shortlist of ten, identify the five values that matter most to you. Rank them 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important. Note briefly why each one takes that position.

Rank	Value	Why it ranks here
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

STAGE 4 - DEFINE YOUR TOP FIVE

For each of your top five values, write a brief personal definition. What does this value mean to you, and what does it look like in practice in your daily life?

Value	What it means to me	What it looks like in practice
Value 1 <i>Name:</i>		
Value 2 <i>Name:</i>		
Value 3 <i>Name:</i>		
Value 4 <i>Name:</i>		
Value 5 <i>Name:</i>		

PART 2 Decision Check

Applies your values to a specific decision.

STAGE 5 - STATE THE DECISION

The decision I am facing

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STAGE 6 - IDENTIFY YOUR RELEVANT VALUES

From your top five values, which are most relevant to this particular decision? List up to three below.

1	
2	
3	

STAGE 7 - CHECK ALIGNMENT ACROSS ALTERNATIVES

For each of your relevant values, rate how well each alternative honours it. Use: ✓ Fully ● Partially ✗ Not at all

My value	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Value 1:	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐
Value 2:	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐
Value 3:	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐

Does any option conflict with a value you will not compromise? If so, it is ruled out, whatever its other merits. If two options are otherwise close, which honours your values better?

Chapter 10 describes values working in two ways: as constraints that rule options out, and as a tiebreaker.

STAGE 8 - REFLECT

Take a moment to sit with what you have found before moving to Step 7 (Decide and Commit).

Which alternative most closely honours the values that matter most to you?

Is there a value that is being compromised whichever option you choose? If so, can that compromise be reduced or managed?

If your logical analysis and your values are pointing in different directions, what does that tension tell you?

What would choosing this option say about who you are, and who you want to be?

YOUR VALUES VERDICT

The Values Verdict in Step 6 of the Decision Cycle questions offers four responses. For the Future-Self Test, see the Regret Minimisation Framework.

- ☐ Pass - the option is consistent with your values: proceed to Step 7.
- ☐ Resolve - there is a values tension but it can be addressed: note which value takes precedence and any conditions, then proceed.
- ☐ Accept - there is a values conflict that cannot be fully resolved, but no better option exists or the cost of inaction overrides it: acknowledge the conflict and proceed.
- ☐ Return - the option is fundamentally inconsistent with your values and a better option may exist: go back to Step 4.