

SECTION 1

Questions for the Big Picture



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VALUES CLARIFICATION

*Right choice is a function of living our highest values;
so, too, it is the key to a life well lived.*

—Kenneth D. Foster



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What are values? They are the ideas and principles we hold most highly in our lives. They bring us the most meaning. They're the North Star by which our soul navigates. The values you emphasize in your life may be different from another person's values, but it's surprising that when you ask people about their values, similar themes emerge. There seems to be a spectrum of high values such as justice, courage, love, and dignity that resonate with many people.

In my own life, the values I hold most highly are spiritual values, values of loyalty, values of abundance, family values, and values of friendship. There are two questions you can ask yourself to help you identify your primary values. I've seen people go through long workshops to arrive at understanding how to express their values. But our values are really *already* within each one of us, and if we ask ourselves the right questions, our values will readily reveal themselves.

Ask yourself these questions more than once to get to the core of your values. Your first answer is the surface answer. Subsequent answers will take you deeper. The first question is, "What about success is important to you?" A lot of people will respond, "I don't know." But if you just go to "I don't know," this immediately shuts down your mind. So if you go to "I don't know," ask another question, "If you *did* know, what about success is important to you?"

Someone might say, "It's important to me to take care of my family," "It's important for me to travel and communicate with other cultures," "It's important to me to have God in my life." When you ask yourself the questions, you're just listening for what's valuable. When we define something as *important*, we're on the trail of our values.

The second question I ask is deeper: "What about life is important to you?" This takes a little more thought. It's a good idea to write out what's important to you in life. Then circle the words and phrases that reveal a value to you. You'll eventually come up with what I call your driving values. A driving value is a little different from general values. The driving value is what most motivates your life, and so if you're not living your driving values, you're going to create pain for yourself.

Let's take the example of someone identifying abundance and wealth as being a driving value. If wealth is indeed important to that person, if he

chooses a job where the wealth-building capacity is very limited, that's going to create anxiety if wealth is a driving value in the person's psyche. For other people, wealth may not be a driving value. As long as they're getting a paycheck and they're taking care of their needs and their family's needs, that's enough for them. Their driving value might be creativity or the arts, and so they might pursue an artistic career even though it's often challenging to make a lot of money in the arts. Or their driving value might be social activism or counseling and so they pursue the path of working for nonprofit agencies. The important thing is for you to identify what *your own* driving values are.

Another reason to know your values is to help you understand when you're in a value conflict in your relationships. For example, if you really want to have children and you're in a relationship with someone who doesn't want to have children, you've got a major value conflict, particularly if having a child is a driving value in your life. If the two of you end up compromising your values, this doesn't usually work, and sooner or later you will both be consumed by resentment and frustration. It may mean instead that you both have to make choices aligned with your respective highest values, even if this requires that you decide not to be a couple.

If you're not living your values, you will feel stress and discomfort. And that stress and discomfort are *good* because they're the signal that you're alienated from your own values. If you are denying your highest values—your driving values—you're denying yourself. And if you deny yourself long enough, pretty soon you have to map that over with the lies you tell yourself, until you no longer know what is true for you. Sometimes, you just go numb and live your life, as Thoreau put it, in “quiet desperation.” Sometimes, you feel exhausted and irritable. Sometimes, you feel that life has lost any sense of fun. Sometimes, you just don't know why you're here. All these are symptoms of lying to yourself about your true values.

If you're in that situation, it's a particularly fortunate moment when you stop in your tracks and say, “How did I get myself into this place of low energy and discontent?” You got yourself there by not living your driving values. The questions of this section will help you get unstuck.

Values are connected to integrity. One huge aspect of integrity is your ability to keep your commitments to yourself. Another equally huge part

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is being aligned in your thoughts and your actions. Your ability to be in alignment between thought and actions depends on first understanding what your highest values are.

Integrity has a lot to do with telling yourself the truth. Tell yourself the truth about your fears, your strengths, your abilities, your gifts, your shortcomings, what is working in your life, and what is not working. When you do an honest self-evaluation of exactly where you are right now, you're opening yourself up to more integrity coming into your life.

Another thing to consider in pondering values is to know the difference between values and judgment. Very often, we respond to others who hold different values from our own by judging them. While it's true that you want to be in closest relationship with people who share your values, and you make choices in that direction, it's also true that being part of this very diverse society, indeed the global community, will bring you into contact with people whose values you don't share. Sometimes, when we come up against a value conflict, we end up telling ourselves a story about it—we label it and then tell a story. “You should see it this way,” or “I don't think that's very responsible; now if I were doing X, I'd do it this way . . .” and so forth.

Being able to separate values from judgment is a mark of spiritual maturity. It's a realization that despite holding different values, we are all *valuable* as human beings. Values are about *you* understanding who you are. It's not about dividing you from everyone else. Let's face it: If everyone held exactly the same values in exactly the same way, life would be very boring. That doesn't mean that you never speak out against injustice. Nor does it mean that you have to accept another's value as being acceptable to you. Again, real spiritual maturity is the ability to speak our own truth and perspective, even if this opposes another, without slipping into judgment of that person as a human being.

Use the questions in this section to help you uncover your own driving values. A really interesting exercise might be to have a friend, colleague, or family member answer the same questions and compare answers. You'll see each other's driving values, and instead of it being a source of conflict or disagreement, it will become a source of dialogue. This may sound idealistic, but if we can't get along with our families, neighbors, co-

workers and colleagues, how are we ever going to get along as a nation or as a world citizen? We can use our values to divide us or to promote peaceful dialogue—the choice is up to us.

Values Clarification

Evaluation

What do you hold dear in life?
What about success is important to you?
What about life itself is important to you?
What do you desire the most in your life?
What do you love the most in your life?
What are your five top values?

Vision

What gives you a sense of freedom?
What do you want to have?
What do you want to be?
What do you want to do?
If you could have anything in life, what would it be?

Goals

What specific values will you set a goal around?
What goals when set by you will change what you value and the way you live?

Purpose

Why is it important to you to live your values?
When you know your values, what will you know about yourself?
If you don't live your values, what will that cost you?

Commitment

Where can you be more courageous in living your values?
What values are you committed to experiencing on a regular basis?

Blocks to Success

When do you lie to yourself that you are living a value but you really aren't?
When do you withhold the truth from others?
Where do you find integrity missing in your life?

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Quantum Thinking

Which value could you start living that you are currently not experiencing in your life?

What is the value that, if you chose to live it, would change your life for the better in a very short period of time?

Actions

What five things will you do in the next week to live your top values on a daily basis?

What do you need to say “no” to consistently so that you can actually be in conformance with your highest values?

Support

Who do you know who can support you in living your values?

By what date will you get a support person?

To receive additional information and support, visit Kenneth D. Foster’s Living Rich Coaching Community at www.PremierCoaching.com and www.GreatestYearEver.com.