

Coaching Notes

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Values: A guide to personal growth



A friend recently asked – “why do you think values are important?”. The simple answer – the more you can see a match between what you are doing and what are important principles for you, the more meaningful and satisfying your experience of life.

Of course he had a follow-up – “so how do I work out what are the important values?”. With this friend an answer in terms emotions or heart and soul; of what you feel, would not do. I tried a more analytic approach – some things matter so much you would not compromise on them, while on other issues you could be prepared to make a trade-off.

When I worked in Papua New Guinea I had a very enjoyable stay in a village in the Highlands. Wonderful hospitality, and many great conversations around the fire. One fascinating conversation was about jury trials. In PNG there are no jury trials – the judge makes the call. My friends were very amused with the idea of being asked to make a call on the guilt of a kinsperson. The crucial value of community meant that for them there could only be one verdict – keep our cousin-brother out of jail!

The jury system only works when a rational-legal set of values holds sway, and all members of the jury are attempting to sort out the facts of the case and make a rational decision. Just as a Highlander would not have compromised on the well-being of a “wantok” (literally “one-talk”, or sharing language and community ties), so we all have values that are pre-eminent. Like stars in the sky, they are constant guides to where we want to go.

Values are not goals. You don’t set a goal and develop an action plan to get to your chosen star. The star is always out there, providing direction to the goals you set – which will move you to where your star is heading.

In coaching and other approaches to personal growth and development, values can help to identify why some behaviours need to be changed. The person who values being a direct supporter of the development of their children but then finds they have not been home for many dinners or weekends has a gap to reconcile. They could work out how to manage their diary to create more time with family, or re-prioritise their values.

Where did my friend get to? Commitment to political action and riding a bike were a couple of initiatives that he saw as helping him to make his contribution to a more sustainable world. Personal action that helped him see that he could contribute to a more values-focused life.

Your values

What are your values? Do you feel that you are doing the best you can to fulfill them at present? What could you do to better achieve this? You can scan potential values to identify those that you connect with (see 60 values that could be relevant to you – from ACT trainer [Russ Harris](#)).

I would recommend that you use the words that resonate with you. Personal growth matters to me – how do I label this? Growth or Personal Development, perhaps New Neural Connections? I go for Stretch – getting in the ideas of both making a demanding effort and also moving into a new space.

You can check some recent decisions where you had to reflect, and decide “what is really important here?”. Taking on a demanding and challenging project could reflect that an underlying value is being fulfilled by this initiative.

A caution – the values that got you to where you are, which are an aspect of present success, might not be useful guides to your future. Jared Diamond in his book [Collapse](#) describes how the values that emerge from success may not be sustainable. For example, the elite of Mayan society valued the celebration of their status through grand buildings. Increasingly intensive agricultural practices were needed to fuel construction. This ultimately resulted in deforestation, erosion and desertification, and the starvation of the people.

Keeping on – clarity and monitoring

How do you keep “on value”? It pays to be clear – what are your core values, and what do they look like in action?

The organisation Rangatahi tu rangatira provides a [helpful guide](#) to its people around how they can work in a way that connects with and reinforces core values. For example:

Value	Description	What it looks like	How to incorporate it
Wha naungtanga	A sense of belonging.	Getting to know one another. Whanau support inclusive ness Connections	Start each session with name games. Pepeha, Promoting team work. Encouraging Whanau involvement. Including kuia and koroua.
Tikanga	The placing into practice that which is correct.	We would see rangatahi operating within the confines of the rules.	Explain rules, boundaries and consequences. Reward adherence to tikanga. Encourage rangatahi to do the right thing by providing them with the essential information.

Monitoring your action is part of keeping on value. For example, [Marshall Goldsmith](#) describes how he has friend call him each evening to ask him – “Did you do your best today to...” – various priorities.

Working towards fulfilling personal values is likely to make the activities of your life more meaningful – you are more likely to see that what you are doing now and will be doing soon is part of a life being lived with integrity. As Fyodor Dostoyevsky noted – “the secret of men’s being is not only to live, but to have something to live for”.

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