

# Core Values Exercise

## What is a “Core Value”

Core values make up the foundation of your belief system. They are your inner-most, deep, and meaningful beliefs and they dictate how you live your life. They may be held consciously or subconsciously. Our core values and beliefs are formed in childhood but they may change as we mature and have more life experiences. This system of beliefs guides you through your everyday decision-making processes from deciding whether or not to treat yourself to an extravagant vacation, when and how much to give to charity, and how to handle a difficult family matter. Core values also help us decide what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior from ourselves or others.

## What are *my* “Core Values”

You are about to discover your Core Values. This exercise is designed to help you identify and live by your top values. If you have done an exercise like this before, you may be interested to see what changes or what stays static throughout your life.

## How to complete the exercise:

- 1) Set aside ample time and space for this exercise. Clear your desk and turn off your phone and TV. Grab a pen, paper, index cards and a highlighter. Print the “Core Values” list attachment.
- 2) Review the “Core Values” list. Read each and every word. Take a pencil and begin by circling values that align with your belief system or values that resonate with you, even if you aren’t sure why yet. Cross out words that mean nothing to you.
- 3) Look at the list of circled items; there could be a lot. While you may hold all of these values, you will only have 3-5 top Core Values and this exercise is designed to help you identify your *top* values. Re-read the list of circled values again and begin to eliminate some while highlighting others. Take your time; the first list was comprehensive but now we are sorting through it to determine your most strongly held and meaningful values. Remember, these top values drive your behaviors and your decision-making processes.
- 4) When you have whittled down your list to no more than 10 values, write each one on an index card. Once each index card has a value listed on it, lay the cards out in front of you. Pick each one up, individually, think about the meaning of this value to you and how it’s apparent in your life. Write your definition of this value on each card. When

you have completed this sequence of steps, you are ready choose your top 3-5 Core values.

- 5) Choosing just 3-5 values may be difficult. So, if you get stuck, come back to why this is important to you. Maybe it's a value that you practice daily or maybe it's a value that you lost touch with but wish to rebuild in your life. Trust your intuition. Top values are often 'non-negotiable'; in other words, if you can live without this value, it's not a top value. For example, if you value exercise and fitness but you can imagine living without it (for any number of reasons), it's not a core value. If, on the other hand, you value honesty and it's an integral part of all of your relationships, honesty is a Core Value.
- 6) Re-write your top values on the spreadsheet called, "**Top Core Values**". Keep this somewhere visible so that you can be gently reminded of your top values throughout your days. You are now aware of your top values and you can begin living a value-aligned life.
- 7) If you are completing this exercise with your spouse, this exercise should be completed individually first, then together as a couple. You will share your top individual values with each other after you have identified your own Core Values. Together you will identify your top 3-5 values as a family. It's perfectly okay and normal that your personal values may differ somewhat from your family values. All of this information will be useful and necessary towards creating happiness and fulfillment in your retirement.
- 8) Be prepared to discuss this experience at our next session. Together we will identify how you can live a value-aligned life using this new knowledge.