



VALUES

WHAT ARE VALUES AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

A SHORT ARTICLE

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OF ITS OWN UNIQUE COLORATION.
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TO OFFER.”

Dr. James Hollis





As part of The Purposeful Leader (TPL), we will provide you with the opportunity to discover your values with regard to your career. Understanding your career values will be beneficial for a variety of reasons, and one of those is that they give you a window into your purpose.

If you are unclear about your purpose, or if you want to double-check your purpose, having clarity about your values can help. Values provide a pathway to purpose; your purpose will be an outworking of, and aligned with, your values. If you are struggling to define your purpose, beginning with your values can be an easier and more accessible first step.

A simple way to consider your career values is to ask yourself the question, *'what's important to me in the context of my career?'*, and this is the question that we will examine in detail during TPL. There's an important point to make here too, in that, what's important to you in your career may be distinct from other arenas of your life, for example, your health, family and friends. What is important to you in the context of your health might be different from your career. Whilst there might be some overlap, this is not necessarily always the case. During TPL, we are interested in your career values, as these will illuminate why you're leading the way you lead.

Shalom Schwartz, a professor of social psychology states that, *'values serve as standards or criteria'*. In essence, he is arguing that values are the principles and standards to which we give worth – they are what we believe in. They motivate us to achieve goals that we, as leaders, strive to attain. They guide the actions we choose to take and how we evaluate actions already taken. They act as the filters through which we appraise proceedings, policies, people and events. And, although there is some truth in this statement, values are more than a simple internal framework against which we assess life.

Your values don't just inhabit your internal landscape; they actively move through your skin and interact with the world in which you engage. Values are, in fact, practices that you are already displaying. They must transcend beyond the world of internal dialogue, or external declaration and into the world in interaction and practice. Values are, to an extent, what you do. They are not an imposition upon the people around you, with the expectation that others will simply follow or submit to them. They are the conscious, and often unconscious, outworking of what you deem to be most important, and they will consistently broadcast themselves via your choices, body and behaviours.

Research from anthropology, as well as early child development and social psychology, suggests that our values are formed in several different ways. Such evidence suggests that our first set of values, formed in our early childhood, are 'imprinted' on us by our care-givers and from our understanding of the environment around us. They are what are expected of us by our culture and are imparted through family, tradition, media, religion, education and government. Observe any child and you will soon become aware that they are already developing a set of values that might show up in their language and behaviour. The Sociologist Morris Massey suggests that our most deeply held values are formed in this manner, in what he calls '*The Imprint Period*' before the age of 7. This Imprint Period then serves to give us a moral DNA that influences our development for the rest of our life.

However, our values are not static. Whilst we form values in early childhood, these are open to challenge in later stages of life namely adolescence and adulthood. Role models and peers influence our values. Think of this childhood question, "*What do you want to be when you grow up?*". Often our response to this is shaped by our heroes, role models or peers. However, even as adults, we still have role models and people we respect. If you reflect on these people, you may identify values they hold which have influenced your own. If someone we respect demonstrates that something is the right thing to do, we often find that we begin to align with that attitude.

By the time we reach adulthood we have acquired a comprehensive set of values. And as a leader when you understand how your values are formed, you will have a clearer understanding of why you act in certain ways.

Interestingly, however, Roger Steare, a corporate philosopher comments that in over 15 years of study with organisations, he is amazed at the number of leaders who have never taken the time to articulate what their values are. Taking time to clarify and define your core values provides you with greater definition about who you are as a leader, and all of this information will equip and inform you with insight that will help you answer the most important question, '*what is your purpose?*'

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