

Defining your personal values...

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "*Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become **your destiny.***"



Our values are our “truth,” they guide behavior, choices, and decisions. It can be meaningful and enlightening to think through and write out what your values are so you can clearly define and live from an intentional space.

Values are the guideposts you consult for much of your daily life. For example, with whom you will spend time, how you’ll spend your time, how you will spend your money. Values often influence the choices you make when it comes to friendships, connection with your partner, in your parenting, and throughout the relationships you share with extended family. Your values can also play a large part in your business life/career as well.

Your values can change and evolve over time; though some will likely remain true for you during your entire life.

For example, one of my personal values in the past few years is authenticity. I cannot say (or write) something that I do not believe or practice. In this case, this value has helped me define my behaviors and live out my unique truth without regard for others' opinions. It's a practice! I work at being intentional with everything I say and do so that I am not saying or doing anything that doesn't reflect my inner thoughts and feelings.

When your words and actions are in alignment with your values, life flows. When they are at odds, there can be discontent, unease, or unhappiness with life.

The exercise below will help guide you to clearly define your personal values, don't rush through this exercise, take time to listen to your inner voice as you walk through the steps.

Step One:

Identify the **times in your life when you were happiest.**

1. What were you doing?
2. Were you with other people? Who?
3. What do you believe was the source of your happiness during these moments?

Identify the **times in your life when you felt most fulfilled or satisfied.**

1. What need or desire was fulfilled?
2. How and why did this experience give your life meaning?
3. What do you believe contributed to your feelings of fulfillment?

Identify the **times in your life when you were most content.**

1. Why were you content?
2. What things contributed to your feeling content?

Step Two:

Why is each experience above truly important and memorable to you? Look at this list of common values and circle 7-10 that really stick out for you. Some will naturally combine, for example, if you value philanthropy, community, and generosity you might say you value *service to others* is one of your top values.

Accountability
Accuracy
Achievement
Adventurousness
Altruism
Ambition
Assertiveness
Balance
Being the best
Belonging
Boldness
Calmness
Carefulness
Challenge
Cheerfulness
Clear-mindedness
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competitiveness
Consistency
Contentment
Continuous Improvement
Contribution
Control
Cooperation
Correctness
Courtesy
Creativity
Curiosity
Decisiveness
Democraticness
Dependability
Determination
Devoutness
Diligence
Discipline

Excellence
Excitement
Expertise
Exploration
Expressiveness
Fairness
Faith
Family-orientedness
Fidelity
Fitness
Fluency
Focus
Freedom
Fun
Generosity
Goodness
Grace
Growth
Happiness
Hard Work
Health
Helping Society
Holiness
Honesty
Honor
Humility
Independence
Ingenuity
Inner Harmony
Inquisitiveness
Insightfulness
Intelligence
Intellectual Status
Intuition
Joy
Justice
Leadership

Perfection
Piety
Positivity
Practicality
Preparedness
Professionalism
Prudence
Quality-orientation
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Restraint
Results-oriented
Rigor
Security
Self-actualization
Self-control
Selflessness
Self-reliance
Sensitivity
Serenity
Service
Shrewdness
Simplicity
Soundness
Speed
Spontaneity
Stability
Strategic
Strength
Structure
Success
Support
Teamwork
Temperance
Thankfulness
Thoroughness
Thoughtfulness

Discretion	Legacy	Timeliness
Diversity	Love	Tolerance
Dynamism	Loyalty	Traditionalism
Economy	Making a difference	Trustworthiness
Effectiveness	Mastery	Truth-seeking
Efficiency	Merit	Understanding
Elegance	Obedience	Uniqueness
Empathy	Openness	Unity
Enjoyment	Order	Usefulness
Enthusiasm	Originality	Vision
Equality	Patriotism	Vitality

Step Three:

This is the most difficult, yet most important step. When making a decision, you'll sometimes have to choose between solutions that may satisfy different values. **This is when you must know which value is more important to you.**

- Write down your top values, not in any particular order.
- Look at the first two values and ask yourself, "If I could satisfy only one of these, which would I choose?" It might help to visualize a situation in which you would have to make that choice. For example, if you compare the values of service and stability, imagine that you must decide whether to sell your house and move to another country to do valuable foreign aid work, or keep your house and volunteer to do charity work closer to home.
- Keep working through the list, by comparing each value with each other value, until your list is in the correct order.

Step Four:

Reaffirm your values.

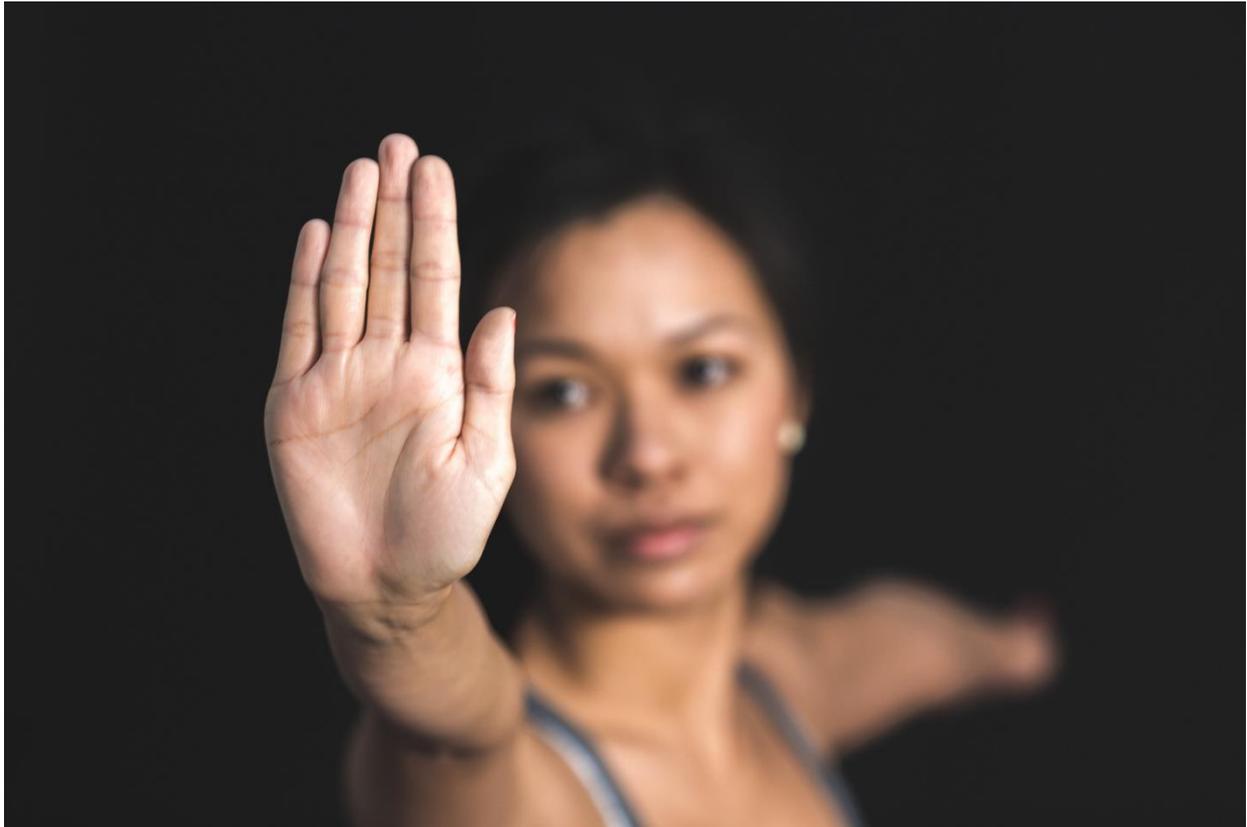
Check your top-priority values, and make sure they fit with your life and your vision for yourself.

- Do these values make you feel good about yourself?
- Are you excited about your top three values?
- Would you be comfortable and confident about telling your values to others?
- **Do these top values represent things you would support, even if your choice isn't popular, and it puts you in the minority?**

When you consider your values in decision making, you can be sure to keep your sense of integrity and what you know is right, and approach decisions with confidence and clarity. You'll also know that what you're doing is best for your current and future happiness and satisfaction.

Defining your personal values will help you define your personal boundaries!

Creating Healthy Boundaries*



“An intimate relationship is one in which neither party silences, sacrifices, or betrays the self and each party expresses strength and vulnerability, weakness and competence in a balanced way.” ~Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

Creating healthy boundaries is empowering. By recognizing the need to set and enforce limits (in part by holding yourself accountable) you protect yourself-esteem, maintain self-respect, and enjoy healthy relationships.

Unhealthy boundaries (or inconsistent/loose or no boundaries) can cause emotional pain that often leads to dependency, depression, anxiety, and even stress-induced physical illness. A lack of boundaries is like leaving the door to your home unlocked...anyone, including unwelcome guests, can enter at will. On the other hand, having boundaries that are too rigid can

lead to isolation, like living in a locked-up castle surrounded by a mote. No one can get in, and you can't get out.

Let's begin by defining boundaries...

Boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify for themselves what are reasonable safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around them and how they will respond when someone steps outside those limits. (www.outofthefog.net)

The easiest way to think about a boundary is a property line. We have all seen "No Trespassing" signs, which send a clear message that if you violate that boundary, there will be a consequence. This type of boundary is easy to picture and understand because you can see the sign and the border it protects. Personal boundaries can be harder to define because the lines are invisible, can change, and are unique to each individual.

Personal boundaries, just like the "No Trespassing" sign, define where you end and others begin and are determined by the amount of physical and emotional space you allow between yourself and others.

Personal boundaries help you decide what types of communication, behavior, and interaction are acceptable.

Why is it important to set boundaries?

- To practice self-care and self-respect
- To communicate your needs in a relationship
- To make time and space for positive, intentional interaction
- To set limits in a relationship in a way that is healthy

Types of boundaries...

Physical: Physical boundaries provide a barrier between you and an intruding force, like a Band-Aid protects a wound from bacteria.

Physical boundaries include your body, sense of personal space, and privacy. These boundaries are expressed through clothing, shelter, noise tolerance, verbal instruction, and body language.

For example: A close-talker. Your immediate and automatic response is to step back in order to reset your personal space. By doing this, you send a non-verbal message that when this person stands too close you feel an invasion of your personal space. If the person continues to move closer you might verbally protect your boundary by asking him or her to stop crowding you or to step back because you need some space.

Other examples of violating physical boundaries include:

- Inappropriate touching, such as unwanted sexual advances
- Looking through others' personal files, emails, documents
- Not allowing others their personal space (entering your boss's office without knocking)

Emotional and Intellectual: These are the boundaries that protect your sense of self-esteem and ability to separate your feelings from others'.

When you have weak emotional boundaries, it's like getting caught in the midst of a hurricane with no protection. You expose yourself to being greatly affected by others' words, thoughts, and actions and end up feeling abused, wounded, and battered.

These boundaries include beliefs, behaviors, choices, sense of responsibility, and your ability to be intimate with others.

Some examples of emotional and intellectual boundary invasion are:

- Not knowing how to separate your feelings from your partner's and allowing his/her mood to dictate your level of happiness or sadness (a/k/a codependency)
- Sacrificing your plans, dreams, and goals in order to please others
- Not taking responsibility for yourself and blaming others for your problems.

Barriers to Boundary Setting

It seems obvious that no one would want his or her boundaries violated. So why do we allow it to happen? Why do we NOT uphold our boundaries?

- FEAR of rejection and, ultimately, abandonment
- Being uncomfortable with confrontation
- Guilt
- We weren't taught healthy boundaries in childhood
- Concern for safety

Assessing your current boundaries

Healthy boundaries allow you to:

- Have a healthy level of self-esteem and self-respect.
- Share personal information gradually, in a mutually sharing and trusting relationship.
- Protect physical and emotional space from intrusion.
- Have an equal partnership where responsibility and power are shared.
- Be assertive. Confidently and truthfully say "yes" or "no" and be okay when others say "no" to you.
- Separate your needs, thoughts, feelings and desires from others. Recognize that your boundaries and needs are different from others.

- Empower yourself to make healthy choices and take responsibility for yourself.

Unhealthy boundaries are characterized by:

- Sharing too much too soon or, at the other end of the spectrum, closing yourself off and not expressing your needs and wants.
- Feeling responsible for others' rejection or abandonment.
- Inability to say "no" for fear of rejection or abandonment.
- Weak sense of your own identity. You base how you feel about yourself on how others treat you.
- Disempowerment. You allow others to make decisions for you; consequently, you feel powerless and do not take responsibility for your own life.

Tips for setting healthy boundaries:

(Modified from the book, *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin* by Anne Katherine)

When you identify the need to set a boundary, do it clearly, calmly, firmly, respectfully, and in as few words as possible. Don't justify, get angry, or apologize for the boundary you are setting. *Bring your energy to the situation in a positive way; do not come from a place of trying to control or power over the person you are setting the boundary with.*

You are not responsible for the other person's reaction to the boundary you are setting. You are only responsible for communicating your boundary in a respectful manner. If it upsets the other person, know that it is their problem. Some people, especially those accustomed to controlling, abusing, or manipulating you, may test you. Plan on it, EXPECT IT, but remain firm. Set the boundary and release yourself from any responsibility to how the receiver will respond. When he/she reacts think "of course this is happening...here is my opportunity to hold myself to the boundary I have created for my health and safety."

REMEMBER YOUR BEHAVIOR MUST MATCH THE BOUNDARIES YOU ARE SETTING.

You cannot successfully establish a clear boundary if you send mixed messages by being inconsistent or by apologizing.

At first you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary. Do it anyway and remind yourself you have a right to self-care. And when you take good care of yourself you will be more readily emotionally available and present to help others (partner/child/friend). Setting boundaries takes *practice* and *determination*. Don't let anxiety, fear or guilt prevent you from taking care of yourself.

When you feel anger or resentment or find yourself whining or complaining, you probably need to set a boundary. Listen to yourself, determine what you need to do or say, then communicate assertively.

Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time. It's a process. Set them in your own time frame, not when someone else tells you.

Develop a support system of people who respect your right to set boundaries. Eliminate toxic persons from your life---those that want to manipulate abuse and control you.

Now is the time to ask yourself where you need to set boundaries in your own life...

*adapted, in part, through www.PostivelyPositive.com