

EXERCISE

Eliciting Values

There are many ways to elicit values. Laura Whitworth used this three-part exercise with me in 1996. In the first part she prompted me to examine my own values with four types of inquiry: what's important, peak experiences, crazies, and invisible values. In the second part we gave a one to ten assessment of how well I was honoring the value in my current life, and in the third and final part we identified my three top values. This is the template for that three part values exploration.

Values part one, eliciting values

What's important to you? What do you care about? What do you want in your life? What do you want for the world?

What is a peak experience from your life? Think of a single time when life was rich, full, exhilarating, flowing or otherwise memorable. What was important about that experience? What values were being honored?

What makes you crazy, frustrated, or angry? Think about one of these things. What value is/was being violated or dishonored?

For most people, there is a fourth category, invisible values. It happens often. A value is so much a part of us that we don't think to write it down on a list. We have seen artists who forget to include creativity, teachers who don't identify learning, engineers who don't include functionality in their lists.

The coach might suggest something they suspect is a value. With curiosity (always with curiosity) suggesting an invisible value could sound like this.

"You've talked about how you like to work, and I may not have the right word to describe it but is independence or freedom important to you?"

The coach might just notice something, "You haven't listed it directly, but I notice the colors and fabrics you wear; is style or design or fashion interesting to you?"

When you name something that you suspect is one of their invisible values and ask, "is this important?" the client often replies, "Of course!" You know you have found one of those invisible, and often core, values. I encourage people to find their own word for the value I tried to describe. They can be more accurate, then that is the word that we write on the list.

Values part two, assessment

In this step you go through your list of values and assess the extent to which you honor those values in your day-to-day life. You are not prioritizing or ranking your values in importance. That's a different step.

Instead, when you score each value you ask yourself (with curiosity), "How does this value show up in my current behavior? Am I honoring it in my day-to-day life? Does it get neglected or lost in the busyness of life? Or do I actually violate this value at times?"

You give your "living it" score a number from one to ten.

Fully honoring a value every day would score a ten, consistently violating a value would be a zero, and neglecting would be some number in the middle, four or five or six.

Values part three, top three

As a last step in the exploration of values, you pick out your top three. If you had three core guideposts in life, what would they be? Or you could ask yourself which of your values, if they were somehow missing, would take away the essence of who you are; if you weren't living this value, you wouldn't be you.

I've seen all the tricks to try to include all your values in your top three. A student or client will say their top values are 1- honesty, 2- creativity, and 3- having fun with family or friends while learning and experiencing nature in a healthy way. Fun, family/ friends, learning, nature and health all in that last value. Sorry, not fair.

Pick three values, just three. This doesn't mean you have to give away any of your other values, it just asks that you give thought to what is most important in your life. You'll be glad to have this level of clarity when you have major decisions to make.

