

A Brief Case for Personal Values

BY MICHAEL HENDERSON

Do you know what your highest priority personal values are? I don't mean can you hazard a guess as to what they might be? I mean do you actually know? When did you last evaluate your highest priority personal values?

Values are the mental concepts that make meaning possible; they provide us with motivation to act and a framework for decision-making. Every sane person has values whether they know it or not.

We can define values as **our preferences (what you would prefer to experience in your life) multiplied by their priority (the importance you place on experiencing the preference)**. For example you may prefer to be healthy (i.e. value health) and yet not necessarily prioritise it through your behaviours, decision-making and energy allocation. The difference between knowing the benefits of health and living the value of health are quickly self evident in your life. A preference without priority is a wish!

Research has shown there is a pool of 128 values that human beings may draw upon to live their lives. It has also shown that people who are conscious of their highest priority values are more fulfilled and happier in their lives. They make more effective decisions for themselves around spending, time allocation, relationships, personal growth and relevant relaxation. To know your personal values (as opposed to guessing at their nature) is to be more aware of who you are, what you want and, of course, what you don't want.

I'm sure you would agree that life can be busy! There is always so much to be done, even if it is simply trying to find enough time just to do nothing.

There are so many things that demand our attention and time. Work, family, health, career planning, goal setting, retirement plans, housework, homework, banking, bills, visiting, socialising, recreation, entertainment, etc etc etc. It's just as well the average life expectancy in New Zealand is seventy years plus, or we just wouldn't have the time to get everything done.

The common trend to make sure we dedicate enough time to all these various and often-contradictory aspects of life is to aim for a balanced lifestyle. New books and business magazines are regularly presenting articles about how organisations need to encourage their people to live a balanced lifestyle. It sounds like a sensible philosophy. I mean balance is good, isn't it? Making sure that things in your life have equal attention, such as ensuring that you create enough family time, to offset the forty hours a week (you wish!) at the office. Balance makes sense, doesn't it? Well for most people who haven't yet

thought to dig a little deeper into their personal values, yes, a balanced lifestyle does sound appealing. However, on closer inspection the whole balance philosophy can often be found to be flawed.

A balanced lifestyle only really makes sense when all the various aspects of your life carry equal merit and importance for you. So often when people pause long enough to really evaluate their lives they discover of course, that in fact some areas of their life, are actually more important to them, than others. In which case why would you want to balance your time, money, and energy around things that are disproportionately important to you?

For example, work and family are both values which are probably important to you, but which is more important and why? Answering these questions for yourself can be revealing and clarifying. Understanding your values enables you to move beyond striving for a balanced lifestyle and create for yourself a prioritised lifestyle. Why would you want to balance your time between work and family if you determined that in fact family was more important to you than work, or vice versa? Of course, it may be that one is actually a means to another. Working may enable you to support your family or having a family may actually support you to work. Understanding these types of subtle relationships between your values enables you to live more deliberately.

The next time you have a few moments in your busy schedule, consider stopping long enough to think, "What's most important to me? How do I express that in my decisions, my behaviour, and my communication?" The answers may surprise you. They may help you make more fulfilling decisions, relating to all manner of things: your career, relationships, finances, investments, holidays, recreational time, health, education, safety, state of mind and happiness. Knowing your values can reduce stress levels, enhance meaning, realign and ignite your motivation, and unleash your passion for being alive. It may even enable you to be happier just being you.



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