

What do you value? What's important to you?



I was sitting in our garden having breakfast with a couple of friends. One of them was describing an impending redundancy program—or “resource alignment”—as his company had labeled the next phase of changing the business. John was somewhat matter of fact about the possibility of losing his job. While he preferred not to go through the experience, he’s been with his company for about 8 years; he didn’t see it as the end of the world. Others around the table listened to his nonchalance with awe, especially since his wife had been made redundant from her company only a few weeks ago.

One friend at the table was clearly more apprehensive. I could see Valerie’s mind working, I could feel her discomfort and fear rising, I could almost hear her thinking “oh, no poor guy!!, what will he do now??” In fact when the conversation moved away from the topic Val kept bringing it delicately back. Her focus reminded me of the direct attention a horror film evokes, you know when you just have to keep watching to know what will happen next.

The conversation included many comments about how both of them actually aren’t that thrilled with their jobs anyway. John said that even though he has worked for the large international IT company for 8 years he has not had a salary increase for the last 5, not even CPI. Val detailed her experience of the team around her shrinking and those remaining having to pick up all the extra work, and create new projects to be recognised as doing their jobs appropriately. They both talked about the internal corporate communications as “just a big wank”. “Resource Alignment” John chuckled, why don’t they just call it redundancies? He described an all hands meeting where the big wigs flew in from Sydney “to sell us the ‘RA’ as if it was a good thing and we should all be excited about it!” “Company core values? Teamwork, customer service, development of our people, creating a trusting environment, etc etc etc,” they all moaned, sure, our experiences really support them.

So what are values and how in the world can they be applied to a group of people when just the handful of us at breakfast clearly had different views about the excitement, thrill or necessary evil of work? And even more importantly, can you easily change your values so your life is more joyful and you don’t find yourself at the mercy of your environment?

Values are the things that are important to us—simply they are the things we value. They are what we move toward or away from. They are largely unconscious filters that cover all human behaviours. Our Core Values and Beliefs are the ones that relate to us personally, to our personality. They help create our unique model or view of our world. Values are how we judge good and bad, right and wrong, appropriateness and inappropriateness. And the good news is you can become conscious of them and change them so that they support your goals and objectives.

So how is it that John could have such a cavalier view of what being made redundant could mean for him and how could Val be so concerned about John’s possible redundancy? How are their values in this arena so different?

Sociologist Morris Massey identified 3 major periods in our lives where we develop and consolidate our values.

Age 0-7: The Imprint period. During this time in our life, we are like sponges, absorbing everything around us and accepting much of it as true, especially when it comes from our parents. The critical thing here is to learn a sense of right and wrong, good and bad. Often we have no remembrance of, and therefore don’t question, the values we

form during this time, we just accept them as truths.

Age 8-13: The Modeling period. During this period we copy people, often our parents but it could also be other people. Did you have a hero during this time? Was it a teacher, a grandparent, a religious figure, a comic book hero (ok, who else really thought Spiderman was the coolest thing since, well since Superman?). Rather than blind acceptance as in the first period, we are trying on things like a suit of clothes, to see how they feel.

Age 14-21: The Socialisation period. The fabulous teenage years where we interact with our peers and are largely influenced by them, sometimes to our parents delight, sometimes to their horror. As we develop as individuals and look for ways to get away from our earlier programming, we naturally turn to people who seem “more like us”.

Other more conscious values change and evolve continually.

And what are the sources of values during those different time periods? We can be influenced by our family, friends, religious associations, school experiences, where we grew up, for example in the country or in the city, the economic times of our youth, for example during a depression, during periods of lack because of civil war or political strife, during periods of great abundance so that we never save anything. We can also be influenced by the media: music and their lyrics, as many parents bemoan the lyrics of some rappers; tv shows such as the plethora of reality shows that paint a different possible reality than sitcoms; video games, especially the ones that focus on honing skills by killing your opponent.

Becoming conscious of your values and how they either support or impede the attainment of goals and happiness is the first step. The first question you could ask yourself is “is my life perfect?” If the answer is yes, congratulations, you are doing wonderfully well and only need to return to this evaluation when (or if!) your life ever falls even slightly off the rails. If you are like most people I know there is always an area of life that could be improved, even just a little. The areas you could look at include: Career/work, Relationships, Family, Health & Fitness, Personal growth, and Spirituality. Whatever area and issue you have identified, that is your starting point.

The next step is to have your values elicited. You could do this yourself but to avoid the trap of being caught in your own perceptions its best to have a skilled and trained facilitator work with you. There are a series of questions to ask, such as “what’s important to you about (topic area, such as Work)?” The questions will surface your values, their order of importance and your motivation for change or remaining the same. Once these are identified specific therapeutic interventions such as Time Line Therapy, advanced NLP techniques and Hypnotherapy can be done.

I have seen this process used repeatedly to help people really become aware of their values and as necessary change them to support the attainment of their goals and happiness. I’ve also noticed that people change their values from time to time. However the Core Values (the ones locked in from ages 0-21) change slowly if at all. And there will also be a certain set of value changes over an extended time- the evolution of values- which I’ll describe in next month’s article.

So based on all of that it’s very easy to imagine how both John and Val could have different values about work and the security of work. Just as you can begin to imagine how everyone on the planet could have different values from you.

“The real voyage of discovery consists of not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” ~Marcel Proust

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