



VALUES AND GOALS: LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

Thinking about what matters most to you

1. Before you take committed action towards your chosen goals, first you need to decide what's truly worth committing to! This is why knowing your values really matters.
2. Consider the different areas of your life, including family, friendships, work, leisure, personal development, well-being and so on.
3. Think about these one at a time. In a few words, capture what you most value in each domain. What does this aspect of your life mean to you? What values would you like to demonstrate?
4. Now rate each domain in two ways. On a scale of 1-10, rate how important this area of your life is to you right now. Then rate each one again. This time think about your current behaviour in that part of your life. On a scale of 1-10, how well have you been living according to what you value?
5. Now subtract the second score from the first. This will highlight the extent to which you might need to change the way you live, in order to better align your life with what you truly value.
6. Remember: on life's journey, values are your compass. Goals are just the roadmap!

Life has a finite, unknown span

Both local and world events are always a powerful reminder to all of us that every life has a finite and unknown span. There isn't an endless amount of time ahead to live the life you truly want. As we reflect on bright lives cut tragically short, in such distressing circumstances, it's worth taking a few minutes today to consider what you want to focus on over the next part of your own life. What do you want to stand for? What qualities do you want to demonstrate?

It can be useful to take a bigger perspective. Imagine those you know and care about are gathered to speak about you after your death, at your funeral service. What would they say? How would they describe you and the life you lived? What would they see as having been your greatest qualities? This classic exercise is one we should all challenge ourselves with at intervals. It's also one we use in our popular goal setting programs and our clients find it can help them reorient their lives in significant ways.

When someone dies, part of what's left behind is a sense of what they stood for. What kind of person would you like to be remembered as? If nothing held you back from behaving as the person you really want to be, how would you treat others in your world? What sort of partner, parent, friend, colleague or manager would you be? Perhaps your answer is something a little uncertain like 'I'd want to be a *good* parent, friend, boss,' and so on. Push yourself a little further. In your view, what are the qualities of someone you'd identify as a *good* parent, friend, boss etc.? Notice what comes to mind.

Why it's important to clarify values before goals

Knowing your values helps you to keep front of mind what most matters to you in life, as well as the sort of person you want to be. When you allow your goals, behaviours and actions to be guided by your most important values, it gives you a strong sense of meaning and purpose. This, in turn, is motivating and energising. You feel you're being true to yourself. You're treating yourself and others the way you want to. You're behaving as the person you really want to be and doing the things that deeply matter to you. This grounds you. It gives you self-esteem, confidence and a daily feeling of living a life that is 'successful' in ways that are ultimately more important than bank accounts and titles.

In this way, values help you set worthwhile goals. Values guide you through life helping you stay on track. They also help you find your way back, when you stray off track from time to time, as we all do. In our goal setting work with clients, they work through a powerful exercise that helps them identify their most significant values at this particular point in their lives. They learn how to use these to help them

set the goals that are right for them. If values are the compass, then goals are the roadmap. For many, this exercise proves to be a highlight of our work together because they'd never before considered the vital distinction between values and goals, and that your goals need to be informed by your values. If you lose this connection, you could succeed with your goals but, in a fundamental way, lose at life!

Values are not goals

Goals should be seen as what you may achieve as you walk your valued path. Goals are specific objectives that can be completed and achieved. This is different from a direction. For instance, if you confuse goals and valued directions, you could have that dispiriting and common experience of securing a hard won goal (an MBA, a promotion, a Board role), only to feel a sense of emptiness. Progress stops. You can feel a loss of direction. Conversely, when goals are seen in the right way, they function as motivating signals that help to keep you moving forward in the direction of the life you want to live. A goal could even be a very small step where, taking one after another, each goal supports you and motivates you.

Values are not outcomes

Values are not outcomes. This is important to understand when you set a goal which has a particularly complex context, with many factors involved, some of which are outside your ability to influence. In a recent program, a client had such a goal in the personal domain of her life. She wanted to rebuild her relationship with a difficult father. This may or may not happen. But getting clear on the qualities she wants to demonstrate, as well as working out the behaviours and actions on her part that would best express them, means that she can live according to her values - even if her father continues to be unresponsive. Sometimes we have to live the value and detach from the outcome.

At times, even after careful thought, a particular goal needs to be dropped. Circumstances change. The goal is no longer appropriate. Maybe a better opportunity presents itself. You should stick with your values, not necessarily your goals.

Values are in the present, goals in the future

The above examples illustrate an important point. The real benefits of the path you've chosen are not in the future (where your goals are). Right this very minute, you can choose to behave in line with your values. In this sense, each step along your valued direction is a successful moment. Choosing the right direction makes the trip worthwhile. A life well-lived is not, in the end, measured by how many goals have been ticked off the 'to do' list. The quality of the journey itself matters. What about you? What do you want your life to be about?