

# Self-Guided Core Values Assessment

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## Introduction

The Center for Ethical Leadership believes that an ethical leader is a person who acts with integrity. We define ethical leadership as: *knowing your core values and having the courage to act on them on behalf of the common good.*

This exercise will help you clarify your core values. It is a challenging exercise, and it will be more meaningful if you do it silently and on your own.

During the process you will highlight the values most important to you. To do that, you'll remove some from the list. This *does not mean that you are throwing values away.* The ones you identify as important will always be important. The narrowing process helps you determine your CORE Values. Pay attention to your inner dialogue as you make choices. Your process will reveal interesting truths about yourself.

Thank you for your interest in values and ethical leadership.

## Instructions

1. Review the values on the assessment worksheet. At the bottom notice there are a few blank lines. Use these lines to add any values that are important to you, but are not listed.
2. Put a star next to all of the value words that are very important to you, including any you may have added. This will become your personal set of values.
3. Narrow the list to your top **eight** values by crossing off less important ones or circling more important ones. Take two to three minutes to do this.
4. Now narrow the list to **five**, using the same process.
5. Now narrow the list to **three**.
6. And finally, choose your **top two** core values.

# Core Values Exercise

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**Peace**

**Integrity**

**Wealth**

**Joy**

**Happiness**

**Love**

**Success**

**Recognition**

**Friendship**

**Family**

**Fame**

**Truth**

**Authenticity**

**Wisdom**

**Power**

**Status**

**Influence**

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**Justice**

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## Making Sense of Your Core Values

You have just discovered, or re-discovered, your core values. Ethical leadership is knowing your core values and having the courage to integrate them with your actions, being mindful of the common good.

- Your value words are packed with meaning. You likely went through a process of “bundling:” embedding one value in another and counting two or more values as one. This is not cheating - it’s natural. This is why you have not really thrown values away; you have clarified what you mean by these words.
- Why two? We ask you to choose two because we believe you can remember two! Imagine putting them in your pockets when you leave each day. Your core values represent your larger set of values.
- How can you use them? Your core values can help you make difficult decisions, choose particular lifestyle, select employment, raise a child - the possibilities are endless. They can even help you find common ground with someone you disagree with. The most important thing is that you integrate them into your life as much as you can.

## Going beyond the individual

If you do this exercise with your family or another group, try the following task: ask each person to stand and say their core values. Having the courage to stand up for what you believe in is a trait of an ethical leader. Appreciate the diversity, and acknowledge that the results shed light on the values of the group as a whole.

Discuss how you chose your values, what they mean to you, and how you express them. Then reflect on what more you can do to make your core values a part of your daily life. Striving to integrate your values with your actions is another trait of ethical leadership. It’s about persistence, not perfection.

It can be as simple as thinking about your values more often. Write your values on a sticky note and post it in prominent places – the refrigerator, your computer, the dashboard, a mirror. Seeing these reminders will encourage you to draw on your core values more often.

## Application Opportunities

The core values exercise can be used with an intact group to build common ground, develop a mission statement, resolve conflicts, and improve work relationships. Contact the Center for information on working with a consultant to explore group applications of core values.

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## Background Thinking on the Core Values Exercise

1. The list of core values is a **deliberate mixture of popular values and virtues**. Words like influence, success, status, recognition, and wealth are valued by popular culture. Their portrayal in the media is prevalent and tempting. Words like peace, love, integrity, and justice are not often reflected in popular culture, yet are understood to be virtues that sustain a healthy and kind community.

A virtue is a value that is elemental, a noble habit that directs us toward the good. It is created through the practice of the virtue itself. In other words, in order to achieve justice, you must act in a just manner. In order to become a person of integrity, you have to act with integrity on a daily basis. There are no short cuts!

The mixed list was created to give participants an opportunity to reflect on the choices available to them. We are bombarded with messages that encourage us to value possessions and status. Yet, when asked to make conscious choices about which values they cherish most, people choose values of a deeper, more meaningful nature. They may wish for comfort and good fortune. These are not bad things, but their “best stuff” usually reflects spirituality, courage, family, love, etc.

This is important for participants to reflect upon. Identifying their core values gives them the personal power to resist passive conformity to society’s more superficial goals. They can use their own core values to build a life of integrity and to create a vision and a lifestyle more embedded with virtuous behavior.

2. In some situations, **words that reflect popular culture have been chosen as core values** by participants in this exercise. It is a matter of personal interpretation, and the facilitator needs to encourage the class to inquire into the person’s motivation, rather than to assume this is a shallow, materialistic choice.

As you facilitate this exercise, a participant will occasionally choose “wealth” as a core value. When asked what “wealth” means to them, they may reply that they want a rich life, defined as being full of good relationships, happiness, health, family and meaningful work, not focusing on the monetary aspect of the word. Some choose the word “success” with a similar definition, as in, “A successful life equates to a life of integrity and meaning.”

Once, visiting Russians chose wealth and power as core values because both were something they had lacked for so long. Faced with overcoming decades of oppressive rule, they recognized wealth and power as the means to a better life – one where people weren’t living in poverty, drowning in alcoholism or poor health, with no hope for the future. Wealth and power were the way out for them.

Other participants have chosen power as a core value, because they believe it is the path to justice. Communities that have suffered from of poverty and discrimination often feel that equity and power are vital to ending the cycles that keep their people down.

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When a participant chooses a word that seems to be a popular value, encourage inquiry and curiosity. By the time a person has sifted and sorted through the exercise, there is more to their core values than meets the eye.

- 3. The list is limited yet allows for expansion.** There are 18 values provided in the Core Values exercise. We do not offer a more extensive list in order to focus attention. The list can be expanded, however, by filling the additional lines at the bottom of the exercise. We encourage participants to add value words that are important to them, but do not appear on the page. Participants often add words such as faith/spirituality, courage, community or health.

We believe that the limited nature of the list does not necessarily limit the choices available to participants. Instead, they are likely to reflect on this list, and on the empty lines, long after the activity. They will become aware of values they express through their behavior and choices, and continue the prioritization process on their own.

- 4. The Center's approach to core values is progressive and choice-based.** This means that we believe in an individual's ability to choose for him or herself what is most meaningful in the context of the common good. We believe (and studies have shown) that when a person chooses their own values after careful reflection, he or she is far more likely to act on these values over time.

This approach differs from many groups that prescribe a set of values. The Boy Scouts are a good example. The values the Scouts espouse are meaningful and worthy, but they are still assigned. While a person can come to "own" values that are assigned over time, most do not connect with the entire list, instead, choosing two or three that resonate most deeply.

The progressive, choice-based approach to core values also reflects the Center's faith that there is such a thing as universal values. Time and time again, we have observed that, when given the choice, people choose very similar values, or choose different words that mean the same thing.

When people do this on their own with no external prompting, their own belief in the commonality of humanity is strengthened, and they leave the seminar pondering the values that are universal in nature.