



Tool 15

Clarifying Our Values

“Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.”

—Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 2000, p. 3

Our values represent what is most important to us—our core essence. They serve as the foundation for what we hold to be of worth in our lives. They are also necessary preconditions for fully engaging ourselves as a learner, leader, partner, and so on. Values are not chosen. They are unique and intrinsic to each individual. For more information on core values, see *When Mentoring Meets Coaching*, Chapter 8, pp. 215–216.

Becoming clear about what we value helps us to better understand ourselves and to create a good fit between our personal values and those of organizations we join or work in. By articulating our values and being mindful of them as we expand our awareness, consider possibilities, and design actions, we connect to our core, our internal compass. This supports ongoing clarity, capacity building, and trust in ourselves.

Below, we offer an organic values clarification exercise designed to use early on with the mentee to identify territory to mine for core values.

Exercise: Your Peak Landscape

Step 1: Identify a Peak Landscape

Mentee

Scan your life and identify a peak landscape—a specific place you have inhabited or visited, where you felt fully engaged and alive, with access to your full splendid self, and aligned with the universe.

Step 2: Describe the Landscape

Mentee

Describe this landscape to your mentor-coach. Be very specific as you share particular details of the place and your experience of being in it. Be sure to access all your senses as you remember the place aloud.



Mentor-coach

As you listen deeply, record key words and phrases that the mentee uses in their description. Write quickly to keep up and be sure to capture the mentee's exact language. Allow yourself to be silent as the mentee paints their picture.

If the description lacks some of the senses, ask questions to elicit these details. Likewise, if the mentee does not include themselves in the landscape, ask them where they are within these surroundings, all the while continuing to write down their exact language.

Step 3: Revisit the Landscape

Mentor-coach

Invite the mentee to listen to their own words and their own sense of place as you read aloud the key words and phrases you captured.

Mentee

Close your eyes and let the words wash over you as you revisit your peak landscape.

Step 4: Mining for Values

Mentor-coach and mentee

Starting at the beginning of the list of key words and phrases, the mentor-coach asks the mentee what core values are present within their words and phrases. Work through the list together to identify and capture a list of the mentee's core values. It is critical to use the exact language of the mentee as their words best capture the meaning of each value. See the example on the next page from Kate and Jeanie.



From Kate and Jeanie



Here are Kate’s key words and phrases that we mined together to uncover her embedded core values.

Kate’s Peak Landscape: Her family cabin in Algonquin Park, Ontario

Kate’s Key Words and Phrases	Kate’s Core Values
“sitting on the dock”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • freedom • nature/being connected
“open water”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not restricted/unbounded • present • inhabiting
“canoe”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • movement/mobility • beauty/design • power/physical • organic • real/genuine/clean • maximizing experiential • family • tradition • peacefulness/solo/quiet
“kayak”	
“rock face”	
“cabin”	
“green”	
“trees”	
“smell of the air”	
“quiet”	
“birds sometimes”	
“interaction”	
“I’m moving; hard to sit still”	
“paddling, swimming, hiking ...”	

For more depth regarding metaphor, see Tool 11.

Mostly the mentee identifies their values. However, if you as mentor-coach think you are hearing other values that have not yet been mentioned, it can be useful to ask permission to share and offer what you are sensing. Then leave space for the mentee to respond and, if they wish, make them their own.



Step 5: Sharing the Values

Mentor-coach

Read the list of values back to the mentee, inviting them to listen to who they are and what matters to them in the world.

Mentee

Close your eyes and meet yourself through your values. Enjoy.

Step 6: Organizing and Augmenting Core Values

Mentor-coach

Ask the mentee the following questions to explore the scope of what they have uncovered:

- *What surprised you?*
- *What core values are missing from the list that you want to add?*
- *What values stand out for you as most relevant right now in your life?*
- *Which values do you want to claim more of in your life (leadership) right now?*

Mentee

Take the list of core values with you at the end of the session. On your own, spend some time clarifying and organizing the list to create a document that reflects your core values and will serve as a reference for you and your mentor-coach throughout the mentor-coaching process.