

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1: *Stream of Consciousness*

Find a time when you can be alone with your thoughts for a minimum of 30 minutes. Some people find it helpful to sit in their favorite chair or room of the house and put on soft inspirational music while they do this activity. Others may prefer to sit by a fireplace or, weather permitting, be outside with scenic natural elements. Ideally, you will find a comfortable place that will inspire personal meditation and free-flowing thoughts. You will need a journal to record your experience.

To begin, take a few deep breaths, close your eyes and feel the fresh air infuse your lungs and body with energy. Feel the vibrant pulsing of your heart, and concentrate on your deepest sensations. Take a few moments to be alone with your body, your energy and your thoughts.

When you are ready, begin writing all of the words that come to mind that represent your *values*. Ask yourself, what words have meaning for me for how I want to live my life? What values express the qualities I respect and strive for? What words describe important aspects of my identity, my relationships, my health, my work and my highest purpose?

There is no right or wrong answer here. Just let the words flow naturally onto your paper. Keep going until you can't think of any other words. When you reach that point, stop to take a few deep breaths with your eyes closed. Then review your list and see if more ideas spring forth from the words you have already created. Remember to think in terms of your whole being and your whole life. To help you, here are some sample questions that you might ask yourself as you do this exercise:

- What values are important to me?
- What values do I respect in others?
- What values were evident in my childhood?
- What did my parents value?
- What values do I want in my most significant relationship?

- What values would I want to teach my children?
- What do I value about my body, my home life, my work?
- What are the essential values for my spirituality?
- What do I value about community and my relationship to the world?
- What are my values concerning money and material possessions?
- What words would I use to describe my highest values impacting how I live my life?

To support you in this process, here are some sample words that people often think of as “values.” Feel free to use any or all from this list in your journal. Allow these words to spark others for you as well.

Charity	Dedication	Health
Helping others	Honesty	Money
Gratitude	Integrity	Freedom
Creativity	Authenticity	Children
Commitment	Individuality	Friends and family
Spirituality	Love	Life Balance
Hard work	Affection	Trust
Perseverance	Generosity	Independence
Achievement	Loyalty	Joy and happiness

Remember, just let it flow! Enjoy the experience of breathing in new energy and letting ideas come forth naturally. Don't worry about the order of the words, just keep writing without regard for spelling, redundancy, or if two words mean similar things – just let it flow!

When you have completed this phase of the exercise, stand and stretch and take whatever time you need before you begin the process of “clustering” your values.

EXERCISE 2: Clustering

When you are ready, review your list of words that represent your values. Add, delete or change any that you want to at this time. Begin to see relationships between words, and put the words in groups that make sense to you. These “clusters” can be formed in any way that has meaning for you. There can be as many clusters as you want, and you may put as many words in a cluster as you desire. Words may be used in more than one grouping.

You most likely will have your own “cluster method;” choose the one that seems right for you. You may just begin putting words together that naturally seem to go together without having a definitive reason for pairing them. That's okay! When you have completed grouping the words together, feel free to label each cluster with a word that describes its particular category or why you have assembled those terms together.

When one woman did this exercise, she built a “tic-tac-toe” diagram and placed her words into the nine squares without understanding what the groupings meant at first. When she was done placing the words into their respective squares, she discovered that each grouping had a common theme, and she began labeling each square to represent its general meaning. She had a relationship group, a work/career group, a group that represented the values associated with what it means to “be an individual,” and so on.

Two more examples of how others have clustered the value words:

- One individual divided her paper into wedges of a balance wheel representing eight segments of her life (Career, Money, Health, Spiritual and Personal Growth, Family and Friends, Personal Environment, Romance/Significant other, and Recreation/Hobbies). She then placed her value words into each section of the wheel that matched that area of her life. Certain values were important for her relationships, others for her career, some for her body and health, etc.
- Another individual just simply used an Excel spreadsheet and clustered the words in columns or “strings” that made sense. No labels, just lists of words that seemed to go together.