

Values Clarification

Discovering what matters most — and learning to live closer to it.



Most of us were taught how to set goals long before anyone taught us how to ask what we actually wanted. We learned to measure a life by what we accomplished, not by what we were quietly devoted to. Values clarification is the slower work of discovering the second question — and then letting it begin to shape the first.

Borrowing from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, values are not goals you reach. They are directions you walk. Honesty is a value; a difficult conversation is the goal. Presence is a value; putting the phone down at dinner is the goal. Values give the small decisions of an ordinary day their weight.

PART ONE

Noticing what you already love

Before you choose your values, listen for them. They tend to live in the moments you forget to perform.

- When in the last month did you feel most like yourself — not impressive, just *here*?
- What kind of conversation leaves you energized rather than depleted?
- Whose grief or joy do you find yourself drawn toward, almost without choosing?
- When you imagine yourself at eighty, what do you hope you spent your attention on?

PART TWO

Inherited values vs. chosen values

Narrative therapy invites a careful question: which of the values you live by are actually yours, and which were handed to you so early you mistook them for instincts? Productivity, niceness, achievement, self-sufficiency, modesty — these are often borrowed first and examined later, if at all.

A value isn't truer because it's old. Some of what you inherited will be worth keeping. Some of it has been costing you more than you knew.

“If no one were watching and no one would be disappointed, what would you stop doing this week?”

PART THREE



An exercise most people haven't tried

The Eulogy / Résumé Split. On one side of a page, list the things you would want named on your résumé three years from now. On the other, list what you would want said at your funeral. Notice the gap. The gap is not a verdict — it's information. Most lives over-invest in the first column and call it virtue. Values work is the slow re-balancing of attention toward the second.

Pick three, not ten. A long list of values protects you from having to choose. Three forces a hierarchy, and a hierarchy is what tells you what to do on a Tuesday.

PART FOUR

Translating values into one small motion

Habit research is clear: identity changes through repeated small actions, not through declarations. Choose one value. Name one behavior, this week, that would be visible evidence of it — small enough that you cannot reasonably refuse.

- Value: *honesty*. Behavior: one sentence I usually soften, said plainly.
- Value: *presence*. Behavior: phone in another room during dinner.
- Value: *rest*. Behavior: one evening this week with nothing scheduled.

Living by your values rarely feels dramatic. It feels like a quieter self-respect that gathers, week by week, into a life you recognize.



*You are not behind. You are listening, perhaps for the first time, to what was
always yours.*