

Compass set to true north



Kevin is a speech and language therapist working within a hospital. The conversation I had with him was both stimulating and inspiring. Kevin had chosen speech and language therapy as a second career. He had always

worked with people but was further motivated to make more of a difference to the lives of others. He works as part of a team. He has a huge variety of clients although he specialises in working with people who have had a stroke. He thinks his salary is adequate for his needs but has no desire to be a millionaire. When I asked him about the challenges that face him in his work he admitted that there are some - but he welcomes them as they all contribute to his learning and development. He doesn't beat himself up over mistakes but tries not to make the same one twice.

So, in this short but helpful conversation, I could tell this is a young man who needs no coaching. His life is balanced yet varied. He loves his work and yet has many interests outside the hospital including horse riding and climbing. He enjoys the camaraderie of teamwork but is aware of and dedicated to his personal contribution. His life is purposeful and he has strategies in place for dealing with stress. In short, his values are clear.

But what are values? Does everyone have them? Do we need them? How do they affect our lives? The majority of people have a vague idea about the number of their own values, and an even vaguer idea of how the multitude of values that people hold actually affects the way society functions.

Clarification exercise

When I start working with a client who - unlike Kevin - experiences confusion and indecision in his or her life, I use a 'values clarification' exercise (figure 1). People often seek clarity in order to make difficult decisions with confidence. So often we do not know what is driving us - but I don't think you can achieve your dreams or ambitions without a clear idea of what that is.

Our values create the essence of who we are. When we behave in a way that crosses our values, then we feel uncomfortable and uneasy. For example, if you gossip about a friend and you have a value around loyalty, you will immediately feel uncomfortable and hope that they won't find out. If you have a value around courtesy and respect, you will be very upset with litter and loud behaviour. Your values are not set in concrete and

Do you experience confusion and indecision, frustration and agitation?

Do you know what is driving you? What must you have - or a part of you dies? Life coach *Jo Middlemiss* suggests we chart a course based on values.



READ THIS

IF YOU

- * STRUGGLE TO MAKE CHOICES
- * REACT NEGATIVELY IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS
- * HAVE OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

the clarification only speaks for the present time - the only moment of time that we have to work with.

When establishing values, I don't just ask clients if they know what their values are. If I did that, they would intellectualise and operate from their heads. I want them to speak from their lives and their hearts.

The whole session usually takes about an hour. Firstly I ask the client to think of a couple of peak moments in his or her life...

Susan is a very successful person to the outside world. Her marriage broke up when her child was only two. She is on good terms with her ex and is well motivated to keep on developing and growing in her life. She has switched from a standard profession to becoming a freelance consultant. She is not a person who is afraid to make changes or take risks.

Susan's peak moments were achieving her degree and the moment her son set off on his first solo adventure. Through discussion, the values that emerged are:

- Health / Well-being
- Love
- Risk taking / Adventure
- Achievement.

Next we look at suppressed values. These emerge at times when a client gets angry, frustrated or disappointed. Susan became agitated if she was stuck in what she considered to be a dead end position. The feeling of being trapped indicates a value of freedom. She loathed derogatory chat at work and became irritated when people were uncooperative. This indicates values of:

- Honesty
- Teamwork
- Loyalty.

When I asked Susan what she would not be without, she immediately said that she has to have time on her own. She also values her health and fitness. She loves outdoor activities not only for the physical element but because she feels connected to the grandness of nature. Shopping on a Saturday afternoon is her idea of hell. The important question to ask yourself is what must you have - or else a part of you dies? In Susan's case this is:

- Connection with nature / Spirituality
- Health / Fitness
- Adventure.

Mutated value

Finally come the questions that are sometimes a bit uncomfortable. What is it about you that drives other people mad? When do you know that you are being a bit obsessive or going over-the-top? Think of the times when people have said things like, "You're such a control freak!" or "Lighten up!" What about the times that you drove yourself well beyond the demands of the job or the circumstances you were in? Our obsessive behaviour often indicates a value taken to extreme. A value of order could appear as obsessive tidiness. (Not my problem but I'm working on

Figure 1 Sample Values List (Dreamzwork)

The following list is representative of words and phrases that illustrate values. You may combine two or three values so long as critical distinctions are not lost. (For example, Honesty/Integrity/Truthfulness maintains a single distinction, but Honesty/Integrity/Freedom combines concepts, and is therefore less clear.)

Humour	Orderliness	Collaboration	Nurturing
Directness	Honesty	Community	Joy
Partnership	Appreciation	Personal power	Beauty
Productivity	Adventure	Connectedness	Authenticity
Service	Security	Appreciation	Risk taking
Contribution	Enthusiasm	Acknowledgement	Peace
Excellence	Tradition	Friendship	Elegance
Freedom	To be known	Spirituality	Vitality
Focus	Growth	Empowerment	Health
Love	Contribution	Full self-expression	Trust
Harmony	Aesthetics	Integrity	
Success	Participation	Creativity	
Accomplishment	Performance	Independence	

it!) Being overly sensitive could be to do with honouring a value of respect. An obsessive behaviour can in reality be a mutated value, so it must not be ignored but pulled back a little and honoured.

So, when you have listed your values, what do you do next? Well, quite simply, it is time to be aware of what you are doing in your life and work that honours your values. Create the list and prioritise the order. Then start asking yourself some challenging questions. If you hear yourself complaining about never having enough money, where is your value for wealth and success? If you are lonely and isolated, what are you doing or not doing to get connected with friends and family? If you can't squeeze into your clothes what respect are you paying to a value of health and well-being?

I am an enthusiastic fan of Stephen Covey (Covey, 1999). His theory on effective ways of living is based on principles. He says that most effective people, like Kevin, are actually off course most of the time, but know which direction they are going in and so are able to self-correct. He is an advocate of starting with the end in mind so that you at least know the direction in which you are travelling. A compass, not a clock - and the awareness that in any situation there is a moment when we can choose our response: "Between stimulus and

response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness."

Stephen Covey does not attribute this quote, but he says that it made a huge impact on him, as it did on me. Once we become aware of the gap we can go further and press the pause button,

giving ourselves some more space. Within the space, according to Covey, is our self-awareness, conscience, imagination, free will and humour. All this sounds like there would be no time to do anything because we would be so busy thinking about what to do but, in reality, it all goes on in a matter of micro seconds because our brains are such speedy computers. (My brother came in after a long day at work and his teenage girls were sniping at each other. Wherever one sat, the younger one

wanted her to be somewhere else. Finally my brother asked reasonably, "Well, where can she sit?" The answer came back " Who asked you a*****?" My brother says, "Time seemed to slow and I had a moment to decide whether to let it pass and dismiss it as teenage angst or go completely berserk. I decided to go completely berserk!" So it is possible to choose strong, natural reactions - but at least be aware that you are doing it.)

I didn't discuss with Kevin if he has ever given his values any thought, but I could sense that he has

Would you like to:

- Identify and achieve your dreams
- Unlock your potential
- Confront difficult decisions
- Shake off restrictive behaviours and limiting beliefs
- Gain and maintain mental and spiritual balance
- Be aware of and use your talent?

Our series 'Winning Ways' with Personal Life Coach Jo Middlemiss aims to help you find out how you can be better at what you do, and better at being you.

To gather material to make the issues - and their potential solutions - as realistic and relevant as possible for readers, Jo offers readers a confidential and complimentary half-hour telephone coaching session (for the cost only of your call). Although Winning Ways will be based on what is raised in the calls, you can be reassured that details will be altered so that it will not be possible to identify individuals.

CALL JO ON 01356 648329
(www.dreamzwork.co.uk).

Our values create the essence of who we are. When we behave in a way that crosses our values, then we feel uncomfortable and uneasy

all he needs to stay on course, and that his compass is indeed set to true north. We all face a challenge in our quest to achieve our potential and life's purpose. To be like Kevin, consider these three questions (Drummond, 2004):

- Who are you?
- Why are you living and working in the way that you are?
- What might you yet become and do with your life?

References

- Covey, S.R. (1999) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. Simon & Schuster.
 Drummond, N. (2004) *The Spirit of Success: How to Connect Your Heart to Your Head in Work and Life*. Hodder & Stoughton General.

Further reading

- Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H. & Sandahl, P. (1998) *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life*. ■

REFLECTIONS

- DO I START WITH THE END IN MIND?
- DO I MAKE SPACE FOR MY SELF-AWARENESS, CONSCIENCE, IMAGINATION, FREE WILL AND HUMOUR?
- DO I ENSURE THAT MY LIFE AND WORK HONOUR MY VALUES?