



YOUR SWEETSPOT

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CAREER INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES

THE STORIES OUR VALUES TELL

One of the greatest moments in anybody's developing experience is when he no longer tries to hide from himself but determines to get acquainted with himself as he really is.

- Norman Vincent Peale

As an Executive Coach, value identification is one of two places I begin with my clients; vision creation is the second. Value alignment and vision compatibility are requirements for every goal, action step, and decision a client makes.

I do not know that we are always conscious of our values, but our lives are filled with stories about who we are. When we take the time to reflect on our stories (times of tremendous pride, over the top happiness, and even extreme difficulty) we can learn a lot about ourselves. Our values can be found in our stories.

As I mentally flip through the pages of my own stories, two of my values can be found in a situation I encountered in the workplace. I was asked to do something that would have compromised the ability of my team to produce the deliverables for which we were held accountable. To say that I was “asked” is putting it lightly. The calm but intense exchange that ensued over a two-week period created a great deal of stress. While it would have been less stressful to acquiesce, I was not willing to compromise the level of excellence that I knew was possible. Excellence is a standard I maintain for my work; this standard is a value for me. The intensity of the situation led me to believe that my job was at risk and it was a risk that I was willing to take under the circumstances. That is when I also realized the significance of courage as one of my values. I continue to reflect on my stories these two values - As I excellence and courage, are reoccurring themes. Take some time to reflect on your stories, look for themes and consistency in your behavior; this will help you identify your core values.



It is equally important that we are accurate in the interpretation of our values. For example, as I thought about my value of courage, I had to be sure that I was not assigning ‘courage’ to what was ‘stubborn.’ Checking in with others who will provide honest and objective perspective is one of the ways to ensure that we are accurate in the naming of our values. Examining intent is another approach. Had the stance I took been about “winning” rather than what was best for my team and the larger organization, my actions would **not** have been courageous.

A second word of caution, we should be careful about how we apply our values to others. For example, as a leader my standard of excellence was sometimes viewed as “unrealistic expectations.” What works for us does not always work for others. We must be mindful and consider the values of others.

In that same vein, our values also color our view of others and their behavior. As I reflect on my own stories I can think of at least one time when I applied my value of courage to someone whose values were clearly different from mine. The judgment that I passed on that person was unfair and prejudicial to our relationship. Our judgments can be heard in a tone and felt in a look, or unspoken expectation that fills the air with biased exigency. Our judgments are filled with “why” rather than “tell me about.”

As individuals, we are all driven by something different. An understanding and acceptance of that difference is critical to our



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reliability. Steven Covey encourages us to “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” As a woman of color, I long for the acceptance and appreciation of my differences and the value they create. To achieve that, I must demonstrate the same level of acceptance I am seeking.

Finally, as individuals, we can hold the same values but they may show up differently. How values play out for us is as different as how we each define success; it is a personal thing.

What do your stories tell you about *your* values, and how they play out in your career, life and interactions with others?