The Power of Personal Values

By Will Linssen

Whether we are consciously aware of them or not, every individual has a core set of personal principles and values that are instilled in us during our upbringing. These values were taught to us by our teachers in life: Parents, teachers, friends, TV, internet, society and religion. Principles & values can range from generally accepted values such as the belief in hard work and punctuality, to more psychological values, such as self-reliance, concern for others, and harmony of purpose.

What is the difference between principles and values:

- Principles are fundamental truths: universal, objective & factual. They are like natural laws (cf. law of gravity) they apply everywhere and all the time and are valid across cultures and religions around the world. In fact all major world religions are based on the same basic principles such as e.g. love and truth.
  
  Examples of principles are: respect, faith, love, trust, integrity, forgiveness, mercy, etc.

- Values are social and personal. Values are the worth, weight and priority we (as individuals, culture, organization or society) put on people, things, ideas, goals, standards or principles. Values are an interpretation, expressions or manifestation of a principle e.g. Europeans show respect (the principle) by shaking hands when they meet and greet a person. The same principle might be expressed in other cultures in a different way: bow, hug or kiss.
  
  Examples of values are: collaboration, teamwork, innovation, accountability, speed, etc.

Although the difference between principles and values is important to understand in society we generally use both words as they were the same. We do not want to get hang up on semantics here. So when we use the word ‘values’ hereunder we mean ‘principles and values’.

When we examine the lives of famous people in our current society or characters from the bible, we often see how personal values guided them, propelling them to the top of their careers. For example:

- Gandhi & Martin Luther King Jr. both were led throughout their life by the principle of ‘non-violence’.
- Einstein’s value was ‘Knowing the truth’ he said ‘I want to know what God is thinking, everything else is detail’
- Jesus’ 2nd commandment (and principle) was ‘love one another’

Same as individuals subscribe to values, so do organizations and institutions. In fact, if we were to examine successful companies, we would discover that one or more business values were the key to their success. Examples are:

- Sears’ value was TRUST as expressed in their commitment to ‘trusting the customer’. From the 19th century onward, any product could be returned to the company with a money back guarantee, which engendered great trust in both directions, enabling booming sales, and, the great success for the firm that followed.
- Ritz Carlton’s hotel chain values is RESPECT through its motto is ‘ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen’. These values of service and respect create an excellent company culture and were the driving force behind the success of the hotel chain. Ever since several other hotels have adopted a similar values.
- Apple Computer's beliefs in the value of SOLVING LIFE’S DILEMMA through 'solving real problems of people'. The company created the iPod player and iTunes online music store to overcome a conflict between those who sought to download copyrighted music for free and the music industry which sought to protect its artists and its revenues.

Likewise, we see how NGO's subscribe to certain core values: e.g. helping the poor, improving the environment, serving community. Mostly the value SERVICE is their central belief.

The key point to keep in mind about values is that ‘principles and values guide our daily decisions in life’ and therewith provides us the confidence that we are making the right decisions and such energizes us to act accordingly. It releases positive GO energy and attracts success, achievement, and well-being.

It will also make us come across as reliable persons and nurtures your relationships with our loved ones. We can energize our personal lives at home and at work by:

- Determining and defining which values we want to live by
- Develop strategies to implement them in our daily life decisions.
- See the fruits and satisfaction it brings into our lives -- in the form of new opportunities and material & psychological benefits.

The list hereunder is adapted from Roy Posner’s list of ‘principles and values of successful people’.
In order to define your personal values foundation:
1. Review the above list of values and mark the 10 values you consider most valuable and important to live by. If you do not see your values on the above list just note them down in the empty space at the end.
2. From the 10 values you marked above note down your top 5 and define its meaning from your perspective:

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<th>My personal top 5 values</th>
<th>My personal definition &amp; meaning</th>
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3. Use your personal top 5 values above to define the 1 or 2 values that are paramount to you and define what this means. Less is more in this case.

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<th>My most important principle(s) and value(s) to live by</th>
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