

29 Most Important Values To Life By

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I have offered this to you, the reader, to give you an idea of what values are and how they are valuable to us as people. I have not edited or changed this text in any way, it is in its original form for your enjoyment. It is copied directly from the website above and I encourage you to check out the article for yourself if you are interested in learning more about the author and the other work they publish.

1. Courage

Courage is about doing what you believe needs to be done — not in the absence of fear but in spite of it.

You might feel disinclined to offer a genuine apology out of fear that the other will reject it, but courage will help you apologize anyway, because it's the right thing to do, out of respect for the one you hurt or offended. Whether they accept your apology or not is their business.

Courage requires a step outside of your comfort zone. If you have no fear, you don't need courage, but when something you know you have to do makes you feel sick inside, courage is what makes you do that thing anyway.

Courage code (or motto): "I do what needs to be done, even when fear comes along for the ride."

2. Kindness

Kindness is about treating others the way you want to be treated.

It's more than just holding your tongue when you're tempted to say something unkind; kindness looks for ways to make life better for others. It takes delight in lifting others up and reminding them they're not alone, invisible, or insignificant.

Kindness and compassion are closely related; the latter involves the readiness to see a situation from someone else's perspective and to give them the benefit of the doubt. It also takes into consideration what the other person has gone through and chooses to respond with kindness rather than anger or vengefulness.

Both demonstrate at least a subliminal appreciation for the connectedness of all living beings; when you show kindness and compassion to others, you benefit (at least) as much as they do.

Kindness to yourself is also important, and it's the basis for self-care. Don't forget to be as kind to yourself as you want others to be.

Schedule time each day for reasonable and thoughtful self-care, and practice mindfulness to be fully present for it. In practicing kindness to yourself, you also make yourself better able to render kindness to others.

Kindness code: "I treat others as I want to be treated — with thoughtfulness, patience, and respect."

3. Patience

When someone is pushing your buttons, taking your time or attention away from something you want to finish, or making your life harder in some way, you practice patience by putting yourself in the others' shoes, trying to see the situation from their perspective, and responding with kindness and respect.

No one wants to be treated like an inconvenience or a burden, and sometimes your priorities have to change to make room for something (or someone) more important or more likely to help you grow.

Patience code: "No matter how I feel when someone interrupts me or gets in my way, I always treat them with the same patience I hope for from others when necessity compels me to interrupt them or get in their way."

4. Integrity

Integrity is about acting and speaking in accordance with your beliefs.

If you say one thing but do the opposite, witnesses to this contradiction aren't likely to recognize you as a person of integrity. They're more likely to accuse you of hypocrisy.

Though you may not be fully conscious of the disagreement between your words and actions, if you believe one thing but your actions profess a contradictory belief, you might feel a growing unease and unhappiness with the way you're acting.

It doesn't feel right. And you're faced with a choice: either change your belief, or change your actions.

Integrity code: "What I believe is made clear by what I say and do."

5. Gratitude / Appreciation

When gratitude is a core belief, you make time for it every day. You prioritize both feeling gratitude and expressing it — in your thoughts, in the words you speak or write, and in your attitude and actions.

You might create the habit of writing a daily gratitude list. And if you recognize the importance of emotion to the fullest experience of gratitude, you'll likewise place a high value on a daily mindfulness practice.

Showing appreciation to others for their words and actions is also essential to making this a core value. Just as you appreciate it when others thank you for a job well done, for a thoughtful gift, or for rendering the help they needed, others appreciate that recognition too.

And far too often, we act as though others must already know how much we appreciate them. Don't assume that they do; make sure of it.

Gratitude code: "In the morning, throughout the day, and in the evening, I feel and express gratitude for the good things in my life. And I make sure everyone who has done something good for me knows I appreciate them for it."

6. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is about letting go of anger and resentment toward those who have hurt or offended you.

You're not saying what they did was okay or not a big deal; you're acknowledging that what they did was hurtful but choosing to forgive them in order to be free of the anger and resentment (toward them) that are making you miserable.

man walking by graffiti Values In Life

In forgiving them, you take back your power and choose happiness and peace of soul for yourself, even if the one who hurt you has never shown the slightest hint of remorse.

Everyone has a capacity for forgiveness — just as everyone has the capacity to hurt others with their words and actions — but not everyone has cultivated a habit of forgiveness.

We learn to be more forgiving by forgiving more. If you write morning pages, add a short list of people you forgive, adding what you forgive them for and something you appreciate about each person.

Forgiveness code: "I forgive those who have hurt me, because I know I've made mistakes and hurt people, too, and I want to be free of this anger and resentment. I choose freedom, and I choose to genuinely want (and work for) the good of those who've hurt me."

7. Love

Love sees the good in everyone, and it wants good things for them. You may not always know what's best for someone else, but if you love them, you want their ultimate happiness, and you want to see them grow.

You recognize that no one reaches adulthood with their character fixed and unchangeable; we're all a work in progress. Things your 20-year-old self would say might appall your 40-year-old self. It's part of being human if you're a human that continues to grow.

Did someone you love do terrible things in their 20's or 30's — things they would never do now (in their mid-40's)?

Forgive them for not knowing better before they learned whatever stopped them from doing those terrible things. And forgive yourself for not knowing that human beings are all capable of terrible things — just as we're also capable of growth.

When you love someone, you don't base that love on the kind of person they were ten or twenty years ago, or on the person, you hope they become or that you wish they were. Your love tells them, "You are enough — just as you are today."

You recognize that their beliefs and behavior may change as they grow, but since your love doesn't depend on what they believe or on whether you agree on everything, your love doesn't lessen with time and with the challenges those changes bring.

Love code: "I love with both passion and understanding; real love is wide awake."

8. Growth

If growth is one of your core values, you look for opportunities to grow as a person and to help others grow, too.

You take the time to identify your values and your overall mission, so you can live in accordance with it and become more and more the person you have to be in order to fulfill your mission.

You know that growth isn't a destination but a process, and you want to enjoy that process and help others to enjoy their own.

You might take an interest in coaching or in group growth opportunities, where members support and encourage each other. You recognize true and wholehearted collaboration as an asset and a growth facilitator, and you prioritize growth over comfort and security.

Real growth might mean shaking things up at home or at work, but the more committed you are to your growth and to that of those you care about, the less you mind rocking the boat.

Growth code: "Every day, I'm growing more into the person I want to be."

9. Listening

If active listening is a core value for you, you value others' input and invest time and energy in learning how to see things from their perspectives.

So, it makes sense that when someone wants to tell you something, you give them your full attention and thoughtfully consider their words.

Whereas before you felt tense with the expectation of having to defend your beliefs against an unfriendly viewpoint, you've learned (through practice) to listen with genuine openness rather than an ego-centric fear of being proven wrong.

You recognize that you don't know everything, and you don't see even familiar things from every angle, so you appreciate it when others share their perspectives. And your body language as well as your feedback shows them you're listening and that you care about what they have to say.

Listening code: "I listen to others with my full attention, so I can learn from them and show thoughtful consideration for their ideas."

10. Respect

If you want to be known for treating all human (or living) beings with respect, you probably base that respect on something more fundamental than someone's rank or social status.

Otherwise, why would you consider it a priority to treat all humans with equal respect — regardless of their age, income, or background?

Or why would you put more energy into making sure the least exalted among you is treated with respect than into making sure others treat you with the same consideration.

It doesn't mean you don't consider yourself equally worthy of respect, but you find it easy to put yourself in other people's shoes, so in making sure they feel respected, you feel more respected, too.

Respect code: "I treat all living beings with the same respect with which I like to be treated."

11. Self-Giving

Another word for self-giving is sacrifice, but self-giving has a more positive connotation. Essentially, you're giving of yourself — your time, your attention, your energy, your treasure, your abilities — to help or enrich another.

couple walking along beach Values In Life

Real love doesn't hesitate to give of itself until it hurts, knowing that the momentary pain is nothing compared to the benefit won by that self-giving.

The word "selfless" implies that someone has given so much of themselves, they've reserved nothing for their own use or enjoyment, but in giving yourself — if you give out of love — your joy is in what that gift brings to others.

Self-giving can be overdone but only when the motive is pride (or insecurity) rather than love.

Self-giving code: "I give of myself to others not only to connect with them but to acknowledge our connectedness. What I give to them, I also receive."

12. Vision

You may be used to talking about vision in the context of a specific person's "vision for the future," but the larger sense of vision is not something that you own or that comes from you; it comes through you and inspires you and others.

Because the larger vision isn't confined to your ego, the power of that vision is free to attract, illuminate, and flow through you.

Your vision is connected to one that is infinite and uncontainable — you do not exist to serve yourself at the expense of others; you exist to cooperate with others in the creation of a community that benefits all living creatures.

Your personal vision — what you see as your response to the larger vision — informs your personal mission and the process by which you live out that mission.

It's not about the lifestyle you want or the things you'll have when you're "successful." It has more to do with allowing yourself to be led by the greater vision through your personal links to it — your intuition and inner wisdom.

Vision code: "I live according to a vision guided by my inner wisdom and judgment."

13. Authenticity

Authenticity is being truthful about who you are. It means speaking your truth, openly and honestly — not hiding for fear of criticism or judgment, which will come anyway.

As an authentic person, you don't expect or need to be liked by everyone. You accept that some will have a problem with you and find it easy to judge you for what you reveal yourself. Some will feel affronted by your "out there-ness."

That doesn't stop you from living your life as you choose to, nor does it stop you from sharing some of what you've learned from your own mistakes. You put it out there, trusting that at least one reader will feel less alone because of it.

It's a gamble you're willing to make. You don't see the point in pretending to be someone you're not or hiding who you are. You know some will see your faults more easily and focus on them, but their opinions aren't your responsibility — or your business.

And there's freedom in recognizing that.

Authenticity code: "I live and speak my truth, choosing not to fear criticism or judgment."

14. Balance

It's not easy to balance work, relationships, and self-care. But you know from experience how important it is to do so.

It's too easy to sideline self-care to get more done — or to put off date nights with your partner so you can impress the boss and (possibly) score that pay-raise or promotion. Do it once, and it's even easier to do it again. And again. Etcetera.

This is not the way to live, though, and you know it. So, you take note of where you are on your priority list when you review your actions for the day. You also take note of how much time you've invested in your relationships. You see the slope for what it is.

Then, you make some adjustments. You start building new habits to prioritize daily self-care and a daily investment in your relationships. And contrary to your fears, you don't run out of time for work. You still get things done.

And you even enjoy it more than you used to. Because balance.

Balance code: "When my priorities are in the right order, balance happens."

15. Community

As a community-minded person, while you're not responsible for how other people might feel about you or your actions, you choose to consider the impact of your choices on the people around you. You value their safety and well-being and have goodwill toward them.

You know your behavior toward those in your community can affect them in various ways, and you want that effect to be as positive as possible. You can't control what others think of you, but you can control what you say and what actions you take.

When you give up your seat to someone who looks tired and stressed, you step outside yourself to offer comfort or silent empathy to another. When you quietly disregard someone else's petty criticism, you choose a better way forward for you both.

And whether you have an active and visible presence in the community or you prefer to work behind the scenes, you make it a priority to leave it better off than you found it.

Community code: "I value all members of my community, whatever their beliefs or backgrounds."

16. Compassion

Compassion is what helps you overcome the impulse to judge another harshly or to find fault with them — choosing to see the good, even when it's hidden.

You put yourself in their shoes to see the situation from a different perspective. You're open to what they have to say and slow to assume they're in the wrong.

You want to understand them more than you want to be right.

This doesn't obligate you to expose yourself to the negativity and judgment of others. You might temporarily block someone's access to you to protect your headspace and well-being. But you don't rule out the possibility of reconciliation and growth.

You want to see others — even those who've hurt you — happy and growing. Ultimately, what they think of you doesn't matter. And it's not your business.

You let go of the hurt and send them warm, compassionate thoughts. Because you're aware of your own faults. And you want everyone to get out of this life in better shape.

Compassion code: "I make compassion the foundation of my behavior and thoughts toward others."

17. Creativity

You are a creator. As such, you have both the potential and the innate drive to create things that make lives better (including your own).

No matter how you express this impulse — through writing, art, craftsmanship, chemistry, robotics, etc. — you put something of yourself into every creation. And from that something, other things grow. You bear a living fingerprint, and you leave your own.

So, it makes sense for creativity to be one of your key values, not just because others see you as "a creative sort" but because the creative impulse is your birthright, and you don't consider a life well-lived that doesn't honor that impulse and explore its potential.

You don't wait for the day to bring you something new; you take what you have and create something. And being a social creature (more or less), you enjoy creating things you know other people will enjoy.

Creativity code: "I am a creator with a unique genius all my own, which I use every day."

18. Generosity

Generosity is a willingness to share your blessings with those who have less. It's easy enough to share with people you know and like; it's another thing to share with those you don't get along with or who seem to think you owe them what you have.

The thing is, no one has a right to hoard resources, and it makes no sense when one person can only enjoy so much. You would rather share what you have so that fewer people will feel the pain of hunger and lack. Fewer will feel neglected, forgotten, or invisible.

You know generosity is about more than donating money or spending a bit more to support a worthy cause. A truly generous spirit is also quick to share intangible blessings: kindness, patience, goodwill, understanding, and forgiveness.

You don't keep treasure of any kind locked up and of no use to anyone while people around you are starving or in pain. You put yourself in their place and share what you have to make their lives better.

Otherwise, what's the point of having more than enough?

Generosity code: "I share my wealth with those who have less and we all benefit."

19. Justice

Justice — to be worthy of the name — must apply equally to all people, regardless of their race, gender identity, income, age, or sexual orientation. You've seen injustice, and you share the anger of those who've suffered it.

Justice is a driving force for you because you see it denied to so many because their race or gender isn't represented or respected by those in power. You'll do what you can to correct that.

Maybe you've chosen a career that allows you to fight to obtain justice for the under-served. Or maybe you'll use your creative talent or time or other resources to further causes for justice.

Whatever you do, it's not to score points or to be seen. It's to look these fellow human beings in the eye and let them know you see them and want what they want.

Because they have as much right to justice as anyone else.

Justice code: "I do what I can to fight injustice wherever I see it. I am my brother's keeper."

20. Learning

You're a big believer in the value of always learning. As an independent scholar, you look for ways to learn about the things that interest you. And you have plenty of resources to choose from: books, video documentaries, websites, podcasts, TED talks, etc.

You're so hungry for learning that you might find it hard to spend your reading time on fiction — though you do love a good story. It's just that there are so many things you want to learn more about, and you have so little time (comparatively) to sit and relax with a book.

You have so many interests that it's hard to stay focused on just one. And you love to find connections between seemingly disparate ideas and disciplines.

The more you learn, the more you realize how little you know and how much more there is to learn, which excites you. You know you'll never run out of things to learn. And it will never get boring.

Learning code: "I aim not to become an expert but to always be learning."

21. Freedom

Viktor Frankl called the last of human freedoms the freedom "to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." Another way to describe this is by exercising your responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings.

You choose how to feel about something, just as you choose how to act.

That inner freedom is what you value more than any flag or statue or anthem. Because no one can take that away from you. It's perfectly understandable also to cherish the outward freedoms you enjoy. But if you lost them, you would not also lose yourself.

So, while you will always speak up against injustice and against tyranny (as well you should), you also recognize that, if you were to lose the advantages you now enjoy — and any of us could — you would not live as though you had no freedom at all.

You can always decide how you will react. You know that freedom without responsibility is a recipe for chaos. And responsibility without freedom is impossible. They depend on each other.

Freedom code: "I exercise my freedom to choose how I react, how I feel, and what I do."

22. Loyalty

Loyalty implies a connection or implicit agreement between two people. When you're loyal to someone, they hold a special place in your life. They take priority over others. Their concerns have more weight with you.

You probably hope to have the same effect on the people you love. You hope you hold a special place in their lives and that, if you needed them, they'd show up for you.

Other words that come to mind in connection with loyalty are faithfulness, dependability, trustworthiness, allegiance, and attachment. When you mull over these words, certain people come to the forefront. And you hope the loyalty is mutual.

You feel the effects of your loyalty toward others, mainly because of how your loyalty-inspired actions affect you and the people around you. In the same way, other people's loyalty or lack of loyalty toward you has an effect.

As long as the loyalty (or lack thereof) doesn't sabotage anyone's best interest, the effects are generally good. You see the potential dark side of loyalty — when it takes priority over the best interests of those involved — and you keep it in mind.

Loyalty code: "I value loyalty that does good to everyone connected with it."

23. Openness

You're open to new people and new experiences. From the moment you heard the words, "I'll try (just about) anything once," you made it your mantra and repeated it in your mind whenever you faced something new:

- A new job opportunity
- A new kind of food or drink
- A new place for a vacation or road trip
- A new person with new ideas
- A new clothing or shoe style

It's not that you necessarily crave novelty, but you do want to be open to considering different viewpoints, perspectives, and ideas. As with compassion, you want to understand them more than you want to be right.

You know your mind hasn't comprehended everything there is to comprehend. You know there's always more to learn. And just as you value continual learning, you value openness and the curiosity that supports it.

Maybe there's really "nothing new under the sun," but it's enough that it's new for you.

Openness code: "I welcome new experiences, new ideas, and new people."

24. Prudence

Generally speaking, prudence is doing or saying the right thing at the right time in the right way. You can have great timing and get it wrong anyway. You can also do the right thing in the right way and still end up with regrets.

Prudence looks at the bigger picture and the deeper consequences of your words and actions. You value prudence because, much as you want to do something, you know sometimes the situation calls for patience and circumspection.

You know the value of prudence has nothing to do with prudishness. And you don't confuse real prudence with the paralysis that comes from obsessing over all the things that could go wrong. Prudence contains wisdom — not paranoia.

And it has nothing to do with fake purity or self-righteousness.

The best leaders cultivate prudence to better serve those they lead. The best teachers cultivate prudence to encourage and challenge their students in the most effective way. The best therapists value prudence because it helps them make the most of their intuition.

Prudence is the ultimate superpower.

Prudence code: "I'm cultivating prudence to make the best possible impact on every life I touch."

25. Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from and adapt to change or misfortune. In other words, when things go bad, you find a way to pivot and keep moving forward. Life knocks you down, and you get back up — every time.

You don't pat yourself on the back for it. You do it because ya gotta. Quitting is just waiting to die. And you want more out of life than an extended hospice stay.

If there's a way to get back up and get moving again, you'll find it because you don't see any acceptable alternatives. So, even if you'd like to stop existing for an hour or so (just to catch a break), you look at your options and grab onto something.

It doesn't have to be something you can hold onto for long. You don't look at each getting up as proof you can't be kept down for long. Life is moment to moment. You haven't undergone every test, and this getting back up is your answer to only one of them.

But the more you respond to knock-downs by getting back up, the more automatic it becomes.

Resilience code: "I cultivate resilience by looking for the lesson in every challenge."

26. Responsibility

You take responsibility for your words and actions and how they impact your life and the lives of others. When you've hurt someone, you do what you can to make amends. You're not too proud to apologize when you know you're in the wrong.

On the other hand, you do not take responsibility for the way others feel about you. You do nothing to offend others deliberately, and if you're aware that a certain expression gives offense, you respect others enough to apologize and abandon that expression for good.

You address others with their proper pronouns and treat them with the same respect you hope to receive. When you fail in this, you apologize and strive to do better.

But while you own your own feelings and don't blame them on others, you don't own the feelings others might blame on you.

Owning: "When you said that, I felt [insert feeling here]."

Blaming: "When you said that, you made me feel [insert feeling here]."

Much as you might enjoy bringing a smile to people's faces, you know you're not responsible for someone else's feelings, just as no one else is responsible for yours.

Responsibility code: "I take responsibility for my own words, actions, and feelings."

27. Self-Respect

You know the value of self-respect because you've seen the consequences for those who have none. And you've seen how easy it is to deprioritize yourself when so many other priorities crowd your plate.

You have to keep earning, so you can pay the bills.

You have to help the youngest with school work.

You have to run errands to buy food, etc.

You have to attend those weekly appointments and/or meetings.

The unspoken words at the end of each of those "You have to" statements is the dreaded "or else..." And the imagined consequences seem far worse than simply postponing a shower so you can get something finished in time for one of those appointments.

You know how it feels: scrambling to take care of everything and everyone but yourself.

So, you've committed to practicing daily self-care as an affirmation of self-love and self-respect. You deserve to be cared for as much as anyone else.

Self-care is key to creating balance in your life. When you prioritize self-respect, other things tend to fall into place.

Self-Respect code: “I show self-respect in my commitment to daily self-care and self-expression.”

28. Spirituality

What is spirituality, if not a healthy respect for the unseen guides and guardians that watch over us and take an interest in our personal development? You don't have to be religious to be spiritual or to make room in your daily life for spirituality.

Your connection to this value is related to your openness and commitment to learning. You know you don't know everything. And there's plenty you don't see that you don't understand. But you'd like to understand it better.

You believe exploring your spirituality with trustworthy guides helps you become more and more the person you want to be. You'll understand your own potential and personality better.

And the better you know yourself, the less you'll feel the need to conform to someone else's idea of what you should be or what you should be doing.

Spirituality isn't about being less than a god or being obedient to religious authority. It's exploring the needs and potential of your own spirit and its relation to others.

Spirituality code: “I tend to my spiritual needs and concerns as part of my daily self-care.”

29. Wisdom

You've learned plenty from your years of school, but one of the most important lessons taught you the importance of wisdom — far and above the value of raw intelligence.

Wisdom is the ability to apply what you know (knowledge) — along with your intelligence — to make the right choices. Ultimately, you know that has more to do with your happiness than your IQ or even your EQ (emotional intelligence).

Wisdom can guide you to make better use of everything you have, including your money, talents and skills, and time.

Wisdom looks beyond what's easy or what feels urgent. It seeks balance and growth. Neither is possible when you take yourself or your relationships off the priority list or when you put other things ahead of them.

Real wisdom knows what burnout is and how you get there. And wisdom, like prudence, is about the bigger picture.

Wisdom is about you seeing the most important thing and focusing on that.

Wisdom code: "I cultivate wisdom to make better choices, to know and heal myself, and to grow."