



A SEE YOURSELF PRACTICE

The Values Compass

*A guide to naming what actually matters to you and using it to work with less friction,
not more.*

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You Can't Build On Ground You Haven't Named

Most people move through their days on autopilot, reacting to whatever lands in front of them, and calling the accumulation of those reactions a life. They rarely stop to ask a more basic question: what am I actually building this around? Not what should I want. What do I want, underneath the shoulds.

That question is the entire premise of the EmpowerMe™ model. Real, lasting change doesn't start with a partner, a team, a title, or a habit tracker. It starts with a clear, honest look at yourself, because everything you build with other people is only ever as stable as the self you bring to it.

This guide is one practice pulled from that first phase. It won't take you more than twenty minutes. It will, if you let it, change how you make decisions for a long time after you close this document.

Where This Fits: See Yourself

The EmpowerMe™ model organizes the work of change into four phases, built on the foundation of Salovey and Mayer's model of emotional intelligence. Every phase depends on the one before it.

PHASE ONE See Yourself	PHASE TWO Be Yourself	PHASE THREE See Others	PHASE FOUR Be With Others
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See Yourself is where every client starts, regardless of what brought them into the room, a struggling relationship, a leadership role that feels heavier than it should, or just a quiet sense of being unmoored. You cannot hold a boundary you haven't identified, extend real empathy from a place of depletion, or lead people toward something you haven't named for yourself first. Knowing what you value is the clearest, fastest entry point into that phase, because your values are rarely hidden. They're just unexamined.

Why This Isn't a Soft Exercise

Sitting down and naming your values can feel like a warm-up, the kind of thing you do before the real work starts. The research says otherwise.

Psychologist Claude Steele's self-affirmation theory holds that people are driven to protect a basic sense of their own integrity, their identity as a competent, moral person acting in line with what they care about. When that integrity feels threatened, whether by criticism, failure, or plain everyday stress, people become defensive, rigid, and harder to reach, including by themselves. Steele's research, and the decades of work that followed from Geoffrey Cohen, David Sherman,

and others, found something specific: briefly reflecting on your core personal values measurably lowers that defensiveness. People who complete even a short values exercise show less stress reactivity, more openness to feedback, and better performance under pressure, and the effect has shown up in students, patients managing health decisions, and adults navigating conflict in close relationships. The benefit isn't abstract. It's a nervous system that has less to protect because it already knows what it stands on.

Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance explains the other half of why this matters. Festinger's foundational research found that people have a strong, largely automatic drive toward internal consistency between what they believe and how they act. When a gap opens between the two, the mind doesn't sit with the discomfort. It resolves it, usually by rationalizing the behavior rather than changing it. A person who values honesty will talk themselves into a small deception being harmless. A person who values connection will convince themselves that another missed dinner doesn't matter. The dissonance doesn't disappear. It gets absorbed, quietly, as friction: irritability, second-guessing, a low hum of exhaustion that has no obvious cause.

Put those two findings together and you get the actual case for this exercise. You cannot notice a values gap you've never named, which means you cannot resolve it honestly, only rationalize around it. Naming your values on paper is what makes the gap visible enough to close by changing your behavior, instead of invisible enough to close by changing your story. That's the difference between alignment and internal friction. It's also, in plainer language, a version of something I tell clients often: success is not empowerment if it costs you yourself. You cannot know when it's costing you if you never wrote down what you were spending.

The Exercise: Know What You Value

Read through the list below on your own, before you talk this through with anyone else. Move in three passes.

- 1.** First pass: check every value that genuinely matters to you, no limit.
- 2.** Second pass: from what you checked, narrow to your top ten.
- 3.** Third pass: from those ten, circle your top five. This is the hard part, and that difficulty is the point. Anyone can value everything. Naming five means you've actually chosen.

Take your time. There's no correct list, only an honest one.

☐ **Adventure.** Exploring the unknown.

☐ **Aesthetics.** Appreciating beauty in ideas and surroundings.

- ☐ **Attractiveness.** Presenting yourself with care.
- ☐ **Caring.** Showing compassion, helping those in need.
- ☐ **Community.** Being part of a supportive group of people.
- ☐ **Connectedness.** Being close to others.
- ☐ **Control.** Being in command of your environment.
- ☐ **Creative Expression.** Innovating and experimenting.
- ☐ **Diversity.** Valuing different people and ideas.
- ☐ **Family.** Building a close knit family.
- ☐ **Health.** Maintaining a healthy body and mind.
- ☐ **Humility.** Staying modest in attitude and spirit.
- ☐ **Influence.** Shaping attitudes or beliefs of others.
- ☐ **Leadership.** Motivating and inspiring others.
- ☐ **Luxury.** Enjoying comfort and pleasure.
- ☐ **Pleasure.** Seeking satisfaction and fun.
- ☐ **Recognition.** Receiving positive feedback for your work.
- ☐ **Responsibility.** Being accountable for decisions and actions.
- ☐ **Security.** Existing free from fear or danger.
- ☐ **Sensitivity.** Staying aware of others' needs.
- ☐ **Simplicity.** Living an uncomplicated life.
- ☐ **Status.** Gaining the respect of others.
- ☐ **Trustworthiness.** Keeping your commitments and promises.
- ☐ **Belonging.** Being accepted as part of a group.
- ☐ **Challenge.** Engaging complex problems and demanding tasks.
- ☐ **Competition.** Testing your skills against others.
- ☐ **Conformity.** Acting within social norms.
- ☐ **Cooperation.** Working toward a common goal.
- ☐ **Discovery.** Finding new approaches to the world.
- ☐ **Fairness.** Committing to justice and equal treatment.
- ☐ **Fidelity.** Being faithful and loyal.
- ☐ **Honesty.** Demonstrating truthfulness and sincerity.
- ☐ **Independence.** Choosing your own course, free from others' control.
- ☐ **Knowledge.** Pursuing truth and understanding.
- ☐ **Loyalty.** Staying steadfast to people and ideals.
- ☐ **Passion.** Feeling excitement and connection.
- ☐ **Pursuit of Excellence.** Performing to the best of your ability.
- ☐ **Respect.** Honoring others' worth and self-determination.
- ☐ **Risk Taking.** Aspiring to what is difficult or uncertain.
- ☐ **Self-Interest.** Attending to your own advantage.
- ☐ **Service.** Helping others without personal gain.
- ☐ **Spirituality.** Connecting to a higher purpose.
- ☐ **Tolerance.** Respecting others' opinions and practices.
- ☐ **Variety.** Welcoming frequent change.

☐ **Wealth.** Accumulating enough to feel secure.

YOUR TURN

Name Your Top Five

Write the five values you circled, in whatever order they come to mind.

Where Does the Friction Show Up?

Look at your five. Now think about the last few weeks of your actual life, your calendar, your conversations, the decisions you made without much thought.

Were you surprised by any of your top five? Why or why not?

Where in your life right now does your behavior not match one of these five? Be specific, a decision, a relationship, a habit.

What has that gap been costing you, even quietly?

What story have you been telling yourself to make that gap feel okay?

This Week's Practice

Pick one value from your top five. Name one specific, visible action you can take this week that would let the people around you actually feel that value in how you show up, not in how you explain yourself.

Insight without action doesn't create change. Do the thing.

This Is the Starting Point, Not the Finish Line

Knowing what you value doesn't resolve every gap in your life by itself. It just makes the gaps visible enough to work with, instead of invisible enough to live around indefinitely. That's the whole function of the See Yourself phase, and it's where every version of the EmpowerMe™ work, individual coaching, couples work, workshops, begins.

If this exercise surfaced more than you expected, that's not a sign you did it wrong. That's usually a sign it's time for support.

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