

# Putting your values to work

## About this article

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“

...articulating our personal core values is one path to reconnecting to what we love about our work.

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What led you to a career in the nonprofit sector? Was it a desire to help people, a dream of making the world a better place, or because you love interacting with people?

Ultimately, we were all drawn to a profession that connects to philanthropy - a concept whose roots lie in the love of humanity.

Love is a powerful reason to pursue our work.

However, for many of us in the nonprofit sector, our passion and dreams can get lost in the day-to-day challenges. Your organization is trying to solve extremely complex issues. The number of people your organization is trying to help might be rising. There is pressure to raise more money, usually with limited resources. You might be dealing with workplace conflicts that go unresolved.

What would be different in your career if you reconnected to the passion that brought you to this profession in the first place?

I believe that articulating our personal core values is one path to reconnecting to what we love about our work, and that living by our values helps us create more energy and success.

Values represent who you are, what is most important to you, and how you want to express yourself in the world. Three positive things happen when you honour your values:

### **1. You feel motivated to take action**

Think about something you need to do that you might have been avoiding. For example, you might have a set of call notes that you need to enter into the database. If this isn't something you enjoy it can get pushed to the bottom of your list. Your values can help you find the motivation to complete this task authentically. If you value connection, then you can think about entering the notes as a way to deepen the relationship between your organization and the donor. If you value fun, you can make the task into a game by timing yourself and having a reward for beating the clock.

### **2. You can quiet your negative voices**

We all have those voices in our heads that keep us stuck in the status quo. They might say you aren't good enough or convince you that you don't want to move outside your comfort zone. Truly connecting with your values can help you move forward despite these voices. Perhaps you want to apply for a promotion at work. Those negative voices might ask if you are qualified enough to do that job. They may tell you that a promotion will mean more work and less time for family. Your values are always stronger than these voices. If you value purpose then you can approach the decision from that perspective. You can reflect on how this new position will help you have a greater impact on your organization and those it serves.

### **3. You have a more fulfilling life**

Values serve as a compass and point you in the direction of what will be most fulfilling and meaningful to you. This isn't always easy. If you value honesty then there will be times you need to speak your truth and risk offending others. If you value time for reflection there will be times you have to say no to people and tasks to create that in your life. But in the end you will be living a life that truly reflects who you are and what you hold as most valuable. And that is the ultimate goal.

I am fortunate to know many successful nonprofit leaders who are role models in living by their values. Here are two real life stories from fundraisers who are putting their values to work for them.

*One of my values is passion. For me, the emotional connection to what I do is critical to my success. What could I get excited about? What made me want to get up in the morning and go into the office? What made staying later less of a chore but just part of what I needed to do? Where was I getting my energy for the day? Today, I can honestly say, I love what I do. I feel like I am making a difference and am respected for the contributions I make. My values may only*

*look like 5 words on a post it note to others but to me they are what keeps me motivated and ensures that I am the best I can be every day.*

*This is a secret permission I've given myself as a charity sector person – no special events. I don't go to golf tournaments, gala dinners, walk a thons, nothing. Once I started a family and increased my volunteer board activity something had to give. And so I created a self-permission hard and fast rule. No events, no exceptions. And it has saved my health, marriage, and soul.*

So what are your core values? Your values are there inside you and you express them every day. However you may not have articulated them to yourself.

The simplest way to start to explore your core values is to explore this question:

***What must I have in my life for it to be fulfilling and meaningful?***

This is a powerful question that can be explored in so many ways – in thought, in writing, in pictures, in conversation, etc. Brainstorm a list of all the possibilities. Make sure you explore fully each aspect of your life. For example you might say I value my career. Explore what values are represented in your work, such as connection, contribution, making a difference, achievement, etc.

Spend a few days creating a list of words and phrases that represent what is most important to you. Use your own words and be creative. Then join me in the upcoming **CharityVillage** webinar [Putting Your Values to Work](#) and together we will further explore and articulate our core values through guided exercises.

*Janice Cunning, CPCC, ACC is a certified leadership coach and facilitator who combines her coaching skills with 17 years of experience as a fundraising consultant and researcher. Janice was previously a Senior Consultant at KCI, Canada's largest fundraising consulting firm. As a coach, Janice is passionate about partnering with fundraisers to help them create an inspired vision that transforms lives. An active volunteer, Janice was a founding director of APRA-Canada and the second international member to serve on the international APRA board. Recently Janice served the coaching community as Vice President and Secretary for the International Coach Federation – Toronto Chapter. She is currently acting as a mentor for graduates of CTI's Leadership Program. Learn more at [FundraisingLeadership.org](http://FundraisingLeadership.org) and follow her on Twitter [@JaniceCunning](#).*