

Values Conflicts : Internal

Values Conflicts that Freeze our Ability to make our own Decisions

Let's now turn to ourselves. Sometimes the most difficult values challenges we face are those that sit within us. We've all experienced it.....

It's like being tied to two horses pulling in opposite directions. That feeling of having an equally compelling argument both for and against a decision, leaving you trapped in a frozen purgatory of indecision.

The bottom line is that all want to do the "right" thing. For the most part, a majority of us are trying to be good, helpful human beings. It's just that sometimes doing the "right" thing isn't clear-cut. And sometimes, our confusion is so intense that we end up doing nothing at all.

For those who seek to consciously live by our core values – there can occur a constant battle with decision-making. Most of the time it comes down to a choice between fear-based neediness and value-based integrity. Even when we succumb to fear, we know deep down what the "right" thing to do was in that situation.

But, sometimes, it's not so obvious. And we find ourselves at times having to choose between two or more values. Examples:

- *Do I speak up honestly and say what I think, even if it will hurt someone's feelings?* A conflict between honesty and compassion.
- *Do I take a bold risk, even though it means breaking my previous commitment?* A conflict between courage and loyalty.
- *Do I take care of my own needs, even if it means saying no to someone who needs my help?* The value of caring is in conflict with itself. (care of self verses care of others)

You may find yourself in such situations, just in life or specifically in your work as a Mentor, and at a loss as to what to do. We call it being caught between a rock and a hard place. So, how to reframe this situation and create real freedom to choose, in full alignment with our stated values? What if – just for a moment consider, that there is no such thing as a conflict between core values and that there is nothing that can prevent you from living by your values. And this includes another values. That in fact, our values complement each other; they do not compete. This is potentially a radical thought. Let's explore it further.



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For a moment, suspend your judgment about the statement on the last page, and expand your thinking to consider that these decision-making freezes aren't actually about values that are in conflict, but that in fact one of the so-called values in this conflict is an *imposter*. How could that be? Let's consider the following possibility, that:

“One of the values in this conflict is Fear *pretending* to be a value.”

This allows us to open up to the possibility that there is some fear of losing in some way, and there is a reluctance to admit that to the self. So, why would fear lie to us? Because the truth can be painful. And as humans, it is easier to believe there is a values conflict than face the truth: That sometimes there IS a need to let go of someone or something in life, but it takes courage – real courage to move beyond that protective lie.

Why does Fear Create a Freeze whilst you Try to do the Right Thing?

1. You carry Emotional Shame:

Emotions provide information about your values, and guidance on how to live by them. Unfortunately, for most of us, during our upbringing, we've learned to distrust our emotional reactions or the exact opposite – that emotions are sources of rational reasoning. And neither of these beliefs are useful.

Emotions work like lights on a car dashboard. They tell you what to focus on and which values are required for a situation, so you need to be listening to them. However, emotions don't tell you the most helpful way to express yourself; that's where your rational mind operates.

If you hold a belief that it's “wrong” or “weak” to experience certain emotions – usually sadness, fear, anger, confusion, depression and anxiety – then you are carrying **emotional shame**. To overcome this, it's important to listen to how your emotions are trying to help you live by your values.

Here's a starter-pack guide. Use this as a decision-making guidance template to build on until you have defined your own understanding of what your emotions are trying to tell you:



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Decision – Making Template

Use this as a decision-making guidance template as a starting point and continue to modify the understanding for yourself, build on this until you have defined your own understanding of what **YOUR** emotions are telling you:

- **Sadness** = It's time to connect with yourself or others through empathy, compassion and understanding.
- **Fear** = Be careful, pay attention to risks and move forward with caution.
- **Anger** = You need to be more assertive, passionate (focused engagement), or respecting of your boundaries.
- **Confusion** = Your beliefs are being challenged by new evidence, so be open-minded, curious and humble.
- **Depression** = You are not prioritising your own well-being, **OR** you are too self-focused. Either way, you need to engage more with the values of giving and respect, and take time to pause, reflect and acknowledge what is happening in reality.
- **Anxiety** = This is a flag as to what is important to you. Imagined future outcomes you've become attached to achieving are taking you out of the here and now. It's time to act with courage, and become curious and more grounded in the present reality.

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2. You confuse Social Pressure (Virtue) with Values

This will arise when when your values want you to do something that you know will be met with disappointment, disgust or offended outrage, from others who are important to you, or those whom you are trying to impress. This will result in your rational mind shifting into gear to mess with your certainty.

During the process of initial socialisation as a child, and in fact across a whole lifetime, as humans we are influenced to believe what others agree upon. This is served up as being a valuable way to live, often through:

- Story-telling (e.g. movies),
- House rules and laws,
- Definitions of “polite” or
- What it means to be a “good person”,
- Religious commandments, and
- Company policies. Etc.

None of these things are actually relevant to your own personal and **CORE** values. **EG.** The greatest revolutionary thinkers and leaders across history simply realised their values contradicted society’s expectations and agreed upon “virtues”. When faced with this conflict yourself, rather than freezing and or compromising, see it as an opportunity to lead in your own life.

What is the Difference between “Values” and “Virtues”?

Virtues appear to be Values themselves, but actually represent an authority’s perception of:

- a) which values are most important at all times, and
- b) how these values must be manifested.



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What is the Difference between "Values" and "Virtues"? (cont.)

No one Value is more important than any other when taken overall as guidelines for our life choices – if they are our values are they are of importance to us. This said, it does help if we are able to decide which is most relevant in a specific context. **EG.** the value of 'courage' may be more important than the value of 'caring' in a situation where you need to stand up for yourself, but overall caring is just as important for a balanced and successful lifestyle overall.

How you live by a particular value is an in-the-moment decision, it is not a pre-planned / pre-agreed action (i.e. a virtue). Sometimes courage means standing up for yourself, other times it means walking away, and there are an infinite number of other possible expressions of courage.

Virtues are more like laws; an authority prioritizes certain values over others, and then dictates guidelines as to how these values must be lived by – what action you have to take. The most significant distinction is that a virtue **requires the approval of others**. Living our values does not.

Living a life in order to obtain society's approval doesn't align with being authentic, and is not a requirement for enjoyment of life.

Common Virtues to be Aware of:

- Staying with one partner for life, even if you lose interest, fall out of love with them (mistaken understanding of the value *loyalty*)
- You sacrifice your own happiness to avoid 'embarrassing' your family (mistaken understanding of the value of *respect*)
- You must have a stable job with predictable income (Not sure what value is trying to be lived by here – what do you think?)

A KEY QUESTION FOR CONSIDERATION: When worried about generating disapproval or disagreement, ask yourself, "Does their potential disagreement align with what I truly believe in?"

This will help you determine whether the point of view of 'others' aligns with your version of the truth. If the answer is no, then have the courage to risk it and go ahead and upset them. From the point of view or conscience, you'll be glad of it in the long run.

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3. Your Values conflict with Social Approval

This conflict comes up around the debate of “Honesty” verses “Protecting Someone’s Feelings”. We are even told that that telling of so called “white lies”, (being deceptive about how we really feel), are justifiable if we anticipate that someone will be upset.

To deal with this trap, it is important to firstly, acknowledge that it’s not about protecting other people’s feelings. How another feels or reacts is not your responsibility – they have to manage that for themselves. Yes, you can deliberately set out to harm someone, but living by your values usually means there is the opposite intention. There is a big difference between actively seeking to hurt someone and being honest with them.

Therefore, secondly – do a self check in regards to your intention. If it is to live in integrity, then go ahead, just ensure that you aren’t trying to deliberately inflict harm, even when you know being true to yourself will upset someone. Holding back your truth just to avoid hurting others is the foundation for a lifetime of regret.

However, this may sound like a real challenge. Due to the fact that many people believe they are the cause of and/or have control over the emotions of others. So much so that we take responsibility for how other people feel. In today’s “Age of Outrage” are we not constantly facing demands to consider other peoples’ feelings before we speak what is on our mind. This is in fact a toxic belief system, and there are three main components to it:

1. We think we can directly control other peoples’ emotions
2. We think some emotions are better than others, and “bad” emotions must be avoided at all costs
3. We think taking care of our own needs is inconsiderate and selfish if it results in an upset for other people.

Some are even so far trapped by these myths, that they spend their life trying to make other people feel good moderating themselves so as not to offend or upset people. Constantly helping others. Let’s take a deeper look at these factors one by one :

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Our Values Conflict with Social Approval because

Some Emotions are Bad

Check out this list of emotions, and after you read each one decide whether it is Good or Bad:

Happy..... Anxious..... Sad..... Angry..... Curious..... Disgusted..... Confused..... Afraid.....Calm..... Depressed

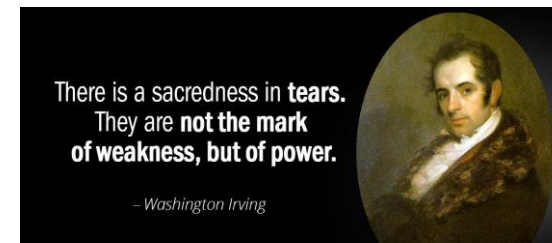
Now think about the following questions:

- How many of these emotions are experienced by all humans? (Excluding those with serious Personality Disorders)
- How many of the bad emotions have you experienced in your life?
- If bad emotions are natural to all humans, why do we think of them as “bad?”

We get raised to believe that some normal human emotions are acceptable yet others are not. A question – “Who decided which emotions are or are not OK?”

We have been led to believe that we should be ashamed of some emotions and that some unpleasant feeling emotions are bad, and therefore they are wrong. This results in our trying to fix those “suffering” from bad emotions. How many of the following situations make you want to intervene and change peoples’ emotions?

- Someone crying without reason
- Two people arguing bitterly
- A friend being unusually quiet
- A work colleague looking humiliated



Seriously ask the question as to why it’s not right that people feel emotions that are completely normal, such as like being sad, angry or afraid. Would you consider it arrogant if someone else was trying to decide for you? It is perfectly, OK to feel, and as this is the ability to embrace the fullness of a rich and meaningful human experience that we call Life. Stop trying to “fix things – make things alright” or denigrating the expression of emotion.

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Our Values Conflict with Social Approval because

Its Selfish to take Care of your Own Needs

We believe its selfish to upset another else while pursuing our own needs. This belief causes people to set aside their values, goals and dreams in the fear that they will rock the boat and cause offence.

There is a fear behind this behaviour **EG.** People won't speak their mind at work because of a fear of losing their job. Women will forgive their intimate partner when they cheat to avoid breaking up. These are examples of one sacrificing their values to gain the approval of another, of keeping them happy, at your own expense. The strange thing is that whilst you tell yourself you're a good person for doing this, yet it always feels horrible sacrificing your values.

It doesn't make you a good person; it simply indicates that you do not embrace courage as a value, and if another reacts badly to you living by your values, and doing what's right for you, whose issue is that? Are they someone worth keeping in your life? And if you keep sacrificing your needs for them, what kind of life will you create for yourself in the long run?

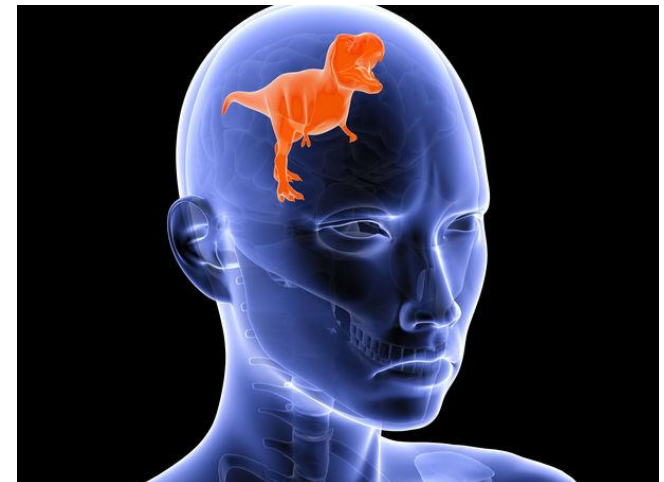
Lets return to the aspects around Fear that create this conflict or freeze in decision making....

Why does Fear Create a Freeze whilst you Try to do the Right Thing?

4. Your Values are asking for Risk to be Taken

Fear pretends it's trying to keep you safe, however in many cases it's trying to keep you in your comfort zone. This is because fear wants the familiar.

This is where there will be potential conflict. In yourself you may hate things the way they are, and want to stop or start something but fear doesn't. Irrespective of the impact of what is going on currently – an abusive boss, an unhealthy lifestyle ... fear is reptilian; it just wants everything to stay the same.



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Why does Fear Create a Freeze whilst you Try to do the Right Thing?

4. Your Values are asking for Risk to be Taken (cont.)

When living by your values seems dangerous, it mostly means it's just unfamiliar. Standing up for what you believe in may seem like it'll hurt you or even risk your life, is believed due to a bias called **heuristic availability**. Namely, you saw evidence at sometime in your life of another getting harmed because they spoke out, or took a stand, or did something outside their comfort zone and you remember that more strongly than the fact that millions of people have done the same thing without getting seriously hurt.

A QUESTION TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU FEEL UNSAFE “Where’s the objective evidence that I’m genuinely at risk? Is this a made-up prediction my mind is creating? What science proves that this is dangerous or unmanageable?”

Allowing the time to reflect on your answers will show very quickly that things like trying new hobbies, asking for a promotion, or standing up for yourself have no factual basis for feeling endangered. It's just fear pretending to be safety because it hates change. As they say ‘just do it!’ Embrace change.

5. No Options being Considered or Presented align with Your Values

Often the our battle for authenticity, it'll seem there is only a choice between two extremes. **EG.** Do I be submissive to everyone, or totally self centred? Do I brutally speak my mind, or keep quiet? Do I risk everything to chase my dream, or stick with a job I loath?

This is a process called “**catastrophising.**” Where thinking about a situation swings from one terrible outcome to an opposite, equally terrible one. This can be seen as all or nothing thinking, and it doesn't serve. Cultivating the ability to consider shades of grey, is a practice well worth pursuing. So, If neither option seems appealing or aligned with your values, ask yourself, “What third option is there that I’m currently unable to see?” This question helps us overcome confirmation bias actively seeks to create evidence to support the presence of other choices

A CLOSING IDEA Other people , trusted sources with your best interest at heart, won't have such attachment so by telling them what you value and explaining the compromising situation you're in, then asking them to identify other options you're not seeing.