

Does Your Career Support Your Values Or Fight Them?



by Eileen Sharaga

Are you secure and comfortable in your job but desperately bored? Do you enjoy the work but hate the politics? Are your capabilities untapped; is your self-esteem declining? Is the best thing about your job the fact that you have a paycheck?

Identifying career issues is difficult because it involves sorting out your small whims from your strong preferences; your rational thinking from your emotional needs.

Can you identify your key values?

- Creative Expression:** Creating new ideas, programs, art forms, innovation
- Helping Others:** Helping others in a direct way, either in groups or individually
- Helping Society:** Contributing to the betterment of the world through global issues
- Affiliation:** Being recognized as a member of a particular organization
- Independence:** Determining the nature of your work without direction from others
- Influencing Others:** Being in a position to change attitudes or opinions of other people
- Work With Others:** Having close relationship with a group or team
- Work Alone:** Do projects by myself with little contact with others
- Competence:** Demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in skills and knowledge
- Change/Variety:** Responsibility that frequently changes and contains different elements
- Power:** Controlling and directing the work and destiny of others
- Friendships:** Developing close personal relationships as a result of work activity

Getting to the heart of the problem means taking a clear look at your innermost values.

People often confuse values with morality or scruples, but actually values are emotional needs—dimensions of our work that we regard as important sources of satisfaction. What really drives you? Is it risk and challenge, structure and security, creativity and self-expression, making a contribution to society, change and variety; does pressure excite you or debilitate you?

These are value questions. Questions which play a key role in achieving career happiness. While we have many values, most of us have one or two key values that predominate over all others—it could be: a subject matter, skills used, a strong drive, an emotional need. For example, creativity may be key to us... but what kind of creativity? Do you write a novel or creatively manage a business? Do you create a work of art or create a center for learning disabled children? Is money a value that's important to you? Was it five years ago but not now? Have your values changed?

As a career counselor, I have heard countless times from clients: "I make a lot of money and things aren't so terrible, and I can't put a finger on it, but I feel empty all the time." Value conflicts are often the single biggest source of confusion in career decision making.

Caught up in the fast track and stressful world we live in, we often lose sight of what is important to us. Yet sorting through these

values questions and conflicts is key to career satisfaction... life satisfaction.

The Valuing Process

A career is far more subtle and complicated than one would think, but there is a process to sorting through these issues. That process is understanding how your values and your job match. These are the 4 steps:

Re-Assessment: Do your values match your position at this time in your life? People seek different kinds of satisfaction from their jobs and find their reward in different ways.

What is really important to you now?

Look at Your Financial Situation: Can you live with less income and if so, how much? Can you give up financial rewards for emotional rewards? Perhaps there are other ways outside of your primary job to earn income. Are you willing to make less than you have been with the possibility of making more in the future?

Understanding Your Barriers: What is it that keeps you from achieving your goals?

Are your obstacles people related, work related, or value related?

Putting it All Together: Getting to the heart of the problem is the first step in getting a clearer understanding of value conflict. Gaining clarity is a difficult process but one that is important to work out and often tough to go through alone. Seeing a qualified counselor can be helpful in sorting through these confusing issues.

Whether we realize it or not, we live our life through our value system. Our sense of harmony and completeness is when our values and our work come together. Career satisfaction comes from knowing who we are and what we want.

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One of my favorite insights into career and job satisfaction comes from an old Chinese proverb:

*To be happy for a day,
go fishing.*

*To be happy for a week,
go on vacation.*

*To be happy for a year,
get married.*

*To be happy
for the rest of your life,
love your work.*

This is where the search into our values can take us.