

The Values and Principles Framework

Most values exercises fail the same way. People pick five nice words, feel good for an afternoon, and never use them again. This framework treats values differently: as **decision filters**. A value you cannot use to say no to something is not a value, it is decoration. Work through the pages that follow and you will leave with values you can actually run choices through, whether you are one person, a team of eight, or a company of eight hundred.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

Rank what actually drives you, then test your last big career decision against it. Expect at least one uncomfortable result.

FOR TEAMS

Build a working charter in one meeting. Shared values settle arguments before they start, because the standard was agreed in advance.

FOR COMPANIES

Turn wall poster words into hiring criteria, review language, and budget decisions people can point to.

01 Start with the full field

Below are eighteen career values, the same set used in the Values Test tool on careercomms.com. Do not shortcut this step by jumping to the obvious ones. The useful signal is usually in the values you hesitate over. Tick every value that has actually shaped a real decision you made in the last two years. Not the ones you admire. The ones with evidence.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| ☐ Achievement | ☐ Financial security | ☐ Learning |
| ☐ Autonomy | ☐ Growth | ☐ Recognition |
| ☐ Balance | ☐ Helping others | ☐ Relationships |
| ☐ Challenge | ☐ Influence | ☐ Stability |
| ☐ Community | ☐ Integrity | ☐ Status |
| ☐ Creativity | ☐ Leadership | ☐ Variety |

Most people tick eight to twelve. That is normal, and it is also the problem: a dozen values cannot steer anything because any option satisfies some of them. The rest of this framework is the discipline of cutting twelve down to five, then sharpening five into sentences.

02 Rank your top five, with proof

Now force a ranking. Ranking matters because values conflict in real life. Autonomy and stability pull in opposite directions the moment a reorganisation lands. Growth and balance collide the week the big project needs your weekend. The order you set here is the order you will use when two good things compete, so set it while you are calm.

RANK	VALUE	A DECISION IT ALREADY SHAPED (EVIDENCE)	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

03 Turn each value into a principle

A value is a word. A principle is a sentence with a verb in it that tells you what to do under pressure. This is the step almost everyone skips, and it is the whole framework.

PRINCIPLE • USABLE

"Growth: I take the role with the steeper learning curve, even when the title is smaller."

"Integrity: I do not present numbers I have not personally checked."

"Balance: I do not answer work messages after nine, and I say so in my first week."

VALUE AS WALLPAPER • NOT USABLE

"We value growth."

"Integrity is at the heart of everything we do."

"Work life balance matters to us."

Not one of these sentences can lose you anything, so not one of them will change anything.

Write your five principles. Each one must be specific enough that following it could cost you something.

04 The five common failure modes

I have watched hundreds of people run this exercise. When it fails, it fails in one of five predictable ways. Check yours against the list before you move on.

- **The aspiration swap.** You rank the person you want to be, not the person your calendar says you are. Fix: every value needs evidence from the last two years, no exceptions.
- **The synonym pile.** Achievement, recognition, and status feel different but often collapse into one driver. If two values never point to different decisions, merge them and free a slot.
- **The borrowed list.** Your top five looks exactly like your manager's, your parents', or your industry's. Possible, but suspicious. Interrogate any value you cannot trace to a decision you made alone.
- **The safe ranking.** Integrity placed first because putting it third feels shameful. This list is private until you decide otherwise. Rank what is true, or the filter will fail you at the exact moment you need it.
- **The one and done.** Values shift with seasons of life. A new parent and a new graduate rank stability differently, and both are right. Re rank every twelve months and after every major life change.

05 For teams: the one meeting charter

You can build a working team charter in sixty minutes if you keep the exercise concrete. The goal is not agreement on words. The goal is agreement on behaviour when things go wrong.

- **Ten minutes, silent:** each person ranks their own top five from the list on page one. No discussion yet, because the loudest voice should not set the team's values.
- **Fifteen minutes, reveal:** post everyone's lists side by side. Circle values appearing on three or more lists. Those are candidates, nothing else is.
- **Twenty minutes, stress test:** for each candidate, someone must name a recent team conflict it would have resolved. If nobody can, drop it. A value with no conflict story is a slogan.
- **Fifteen minutes, write the norms:** convert the survivors into three to five behaviour rules using the principle format from step three. Post them where the work happens, not on a slide nobody opens.

One warning for team leads: you go last in every round. The exercise measures the team's real culture, and your rank talks first if you let it.

06 For companies: values that survive budget season

Company values earn their keep in exactly three systems: who you hire, who you promote, and what you fund. If a stated value appears in none of those systems, your real values are whatever those systems currently reward. Employees work this out within their first month, so the gap between stated and operational values is expensive. It reads as hypocrisy, and it trains people to ignore everything else you publish.

STATED VALUE	HIRING: WHAT WE SCREEN FOR	PROMOTION: WHAT WE REWARD	BUDGET: WHAT WE FUND

Run the audit quarterly. Any row where the three cells cannot be filled without wincing is a value you are advertising but not operating. Either build the missing system or retire the word. Both are respectable choices. Keeping the gap is not.

A practical note on rollout: never launch company values with posters. Launch them with a decision. Kill a profitable but misaligned project, promote the person who embodied the value under pressure, or fund the unglamorous fix everyone complains about. One visible decision buys more belief than a year of internal campaigns.

07 Case study: the offer that looked perfect

A mid career professional I coached in Seoul had two offers. Offer A: a global brand, a twenty percent raise, a title jump, and a manager with a reputation for burning people out. Offer B: a smaller company, a five percent raise, and explicit ownership of a new market. Everyone in his life said take A. His ranked values said otherwise: growth first, autonomy second, financial security fourth.

We ran the filter. Offer A paid value four generously and starved values one and two, because the role was execution inside someone else's playbook. Offer B paid the top two directly. He took B, and the discomfort of explaining that choice to his family lasted two weeks. Eighteen months later he was running a team of six with a market he had built. The filter did not make the decision easy. It made the decision clear, and those are different things.

08 The decision filter test

Finish by testing the framework against something live. Take one decision you are facing right now, a job offer, a project priority call, a hire. Run it through your ranked five, top value first. Write what each value says about the decision. When two values disagree, the higher rank wins. That is why you ranked them.

09 Your ninety day operating plan

WHEN	INDIVIDUAL	TEAM	COMPANY
Today	Complete the ranking with evidence. Photograph it.	Book the sixty minute charter meeting.	Pull the current values page and list where each value operates.
Day 30	Run one real decision through the filter and write the result.	Norms posted where work happens. First conflict resolved by pointing at one.	Hiring criteria updated to screen for one named value.
Day 90	Re read the ranking. Adjust one value if the evidence has changed.	Retro: which norm got used, which got ignored, and why.	First budget or promotion decision made and explained using a value.

A NOTE FROM THE CLASSROOM

I have run this exercise with undergraduates in Seoul, with executives who manage hundreds of people, and with teams in the middle of real crises. The pattern never changes: the first ranking is aspirational, the second is real. So do the ranking twice, a week apart, and trust the second one. The week in between is where you catch yourself choosing status while claiming balance. That catch is worth more than the worksheet.

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TAKE IT FURTHER

The interactive version ranks all eighteen values for you and builds the conflict pairs automatically. Free, no signup: careercomms.com/tools/values-test