

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



A New Year and Renewed Core Values

With this month being the start of a new year and our month's life skill topic, *Relationships/Core Values*, let's get started. How about renewing your core values before you start on any New Year resolutions?

You may wonder, "What are my core values?" First, name off 5 core values you definitely know reflect your heart and commitments in life. Below is a list of 83 core values from a *Personal Values Inventory*, from which my clients choose their top ten. Do you find your five there? Choose 5 more from the list. Then put these top ten in order of significance to you on a 3x5 card to review each day throughout this month.

ACCEPTANCE—to be accepted as I am
ACCURACY—to be accurate in my opinions and beliefs

ACHIEVEMENTS—to have important accomplishments

ADVENTURE—to have new and exciting experiences

ATTRACTIVENESS—to be physically attractive

AUTHORITY—to be in charge of and responsible for others

AUTONOMY—to be self-determined and independent

BEAUTY—to appreciate beauty around me

CARING—to take care of others

CHALLENGE—to take on difficult tasks and problems

CHANGE—to have a life full of change and variety

COMFORT—to have a pleasant and comfortable life

COMMITMENT—to make enduring, meaningful commitments

COMPASSION—to feel and act on concern for others

CONTRIBUTION—to make a lasting contribution in the world

COOPERATION—to work collaboratively with others

COURTESY—to be considerate and polite toward others

CREATIVITY—to have new and original ideas

DEPENDABILITY—to be reliable and trustworthy

DUTY—to carry out my duties and obligations

ECOLOGY—to live in harmony with the environment

EXCITEMENT—to have a life full of thrills and stimulation
 FAITHFULNESS—to be loyal and true in relationships
 FAME—to be known and recognized
 FAMILY—to have a happy, loving family
 FITNESS—to be physically fit and strong
 FLEXIBILITY—to adjust to new circumstances easily
 FORGIVENESS—to be forgiving of others
 FRIENDSHIP—to have close, supportive friends
 FUN—to play and have fun
 GENEROSITY—to give what I have to others
 GENUINENESS—to act in a manner that is true to who I am
 GOD’S WILL—to seek and obey the will of God
 GROWTH—to keep changing and growing
 HEALTH—to be physically well and healthy
 HELPFULNESS—to be helpful to others
 HONESTY—to be honest and truthful
 HOPE—to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook
 HUMILITY—to be modest and unassuming
 HUMOR—to see the humorous side of myself and the world
 INDEPENDENCE—to be free from dependence on others
 INDUSTRY—to work hard and well at my life tasks
 INNER PEACE—to experience personal peace
 INTIMACY—to share my innermost experiences with others
 JUSTICE—to promote fair and equal treatment for all
 KNOWLEDGE—to learn and contribute valuable knowledge
 LEISURE—to take time to relax and enjoy
 LOVED—to be loved by those close to me
 LOVING—to give love to others
 MASTERY—to be competent in my everyday activities
 MINDFULNESS—to live conscious and mindful of the present moment
 MODERATION—to avoid excesses and find a middle ground
 MONOGAMY—to have one close, loving relationship
 NON-CONFORMITY—to question and challenge authority and norms
 NURTURANCE—to take care of and nurture others
 OPENNESS—to be open to new experiences, ideas, and options
 ORDER—to have a life that is well-ordered and organized
 PASSION—to have deep feelings about ideas, activities, or people
 PLEASURE—to feel good
 POPULARITY—to be well-liked by many people
 POWER—to have control over others
 PURPOSE—to have meaning and direction in my life
 RATIONALITY—to be guided by reason and logic
 REALISM—to see and act realistically and practically
 RESPONSIBILITY—to make and carry out responsible decisions
 RISK—to take risks and chances
 ROMANCE—to have intense, exciting love in my life
 SAFETY—to be safe and secure
 SELF-ACCEPTANCE—to accept myself as I am
 SELF-CONTROL—to be disciplined in my own actions
 SELF-ESTEEM—to feel good about myself
 SELF-KNOWLEDGE—to have a deep and honest understanding of myself
 SERVICE—to be of service to others
 SEXUALITY—to have an active and satisfying sex life
 SIMPLICITY—to live life simply, with minimal needs
 SOLITUDE—to have time and space where I can be apart from others
 SPIRITUALITY—to grow and mature spiritually
 STABILITY—to have a life that stays fairly consistent
 TOLERANCE—to accept and respect those who differ from me
 TRADITION—to follow respected patterns of the past
 VIRTUE—to live a morally pure and excellent life
 WEALTH—to have plenty of money
 WORLD PEACE—to work to promote peace in the world

Throughout this month's life skill, *Relationships & Core Values*, it is time to discover how you apply your core values in everyday life. These core values drive your thoughts, decisions, and actions each day in all twelve life skills covered throughout the year in *From the Heart* articles—*Relationships/Core Values, Time Management, Career/Money Management, Recordkeeping, Possessions Care, Housekeeping, Meals, Childcare, Recreation/Entertainment, Reflection, Celebration*.

When you read your top ten core values, how do they support these life skills and the level of satisfaction you see for yourself? Do you see any gaps where you may need to reassess your core values related to those less satisfying daily life skill areas or dimensions? In next week's article, we will focus on your top ten core values and life satisfaction in *Relationships* that are foundational for all twelve life skill dimensions.

So, as you make any New Year's resolutions, remember that relationships have everything to do with "*being*" and not so much of your "doing" a to-do list. Get ready for an exciting year coming our way for each of our lives, community, and nation! I look forward to our journey together to see what 2008 brings us. May we all abundantly experience this year a truly happy, purpose-filled New Year and a renewal of Core Values/Relationships for us all!

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Core Values & Life Satisfaction—Making it Better in 2008

Throughout this month's life skill, *Relationships & Core Values*, it is time to discover how you apply your core values in everyday life. These core values drive your thoughts, decisions, and actions each day in all twelve life skills covered throughout the year in *From the Heart* articles.

Let's review a brief description to help you further understand each life skill area to be covered throughout the year:

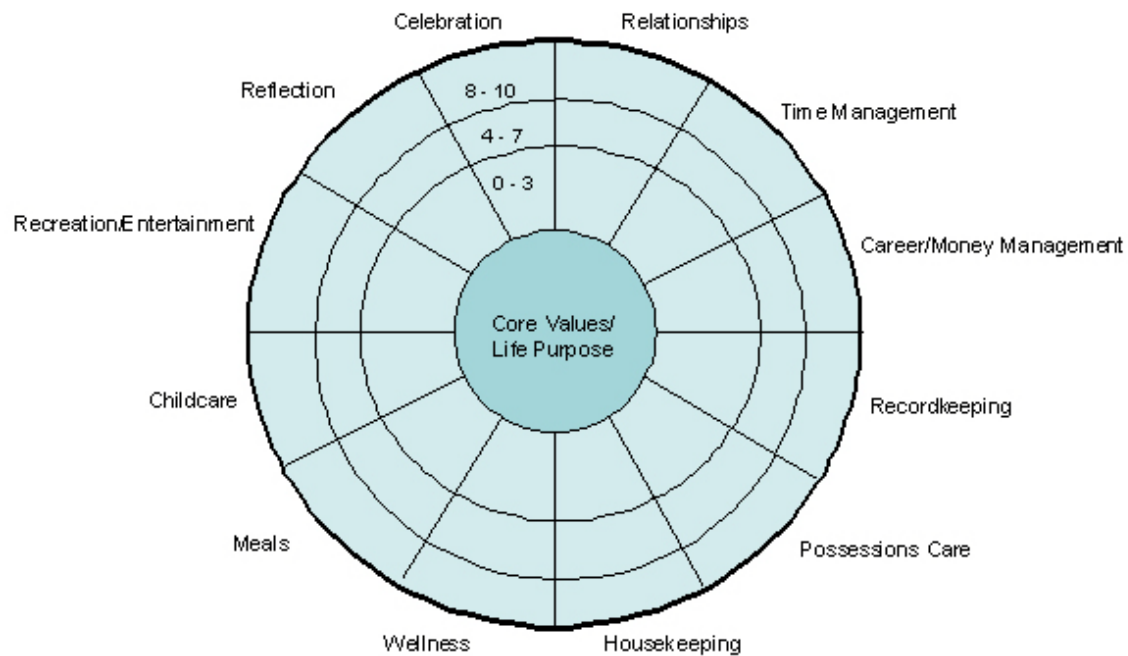
1. *Relationships/Core Values & Vision* – include all 4 realms of personal self, physical self (spirit, soul, body), others (family, friends, work, community), and societal systems (public/private entities, government agencies, institutions, organizations).
2. *Time Management* – includes all one does during a daily 24 hour period.
3. *Career/Money Management* – includes career choices/transitions, finances, money management skills, attitudes toward money.
4. *Recordkeeping* – includes tools and methodologies for maintaining personal and business records.

5. *Possessions Care* – includes all your physical possessions/assets and commitment to their care.
6. *Housekeeping* – specific to housecleaning chores, who does them, when, and how.
7. *Wellness* – includes all aspects of health and wellness goals with emphasis on nutrition/food choices/eating habits, exercise, stress management.
8. *Meals* – includes meal planning, meal times and location, family and guests.
9. *Childcare* – includes all aspects of caring for children from pregnancy throughout childhood.
10. *Recreation/Entertainment* – includes all activities specific to routine recreational/entertainment choices based on core values, social interaction, and just plain fun.
11. *Reflection* – review of all life skill areas, impact of decisions and actions in each area; consider what is most important to you.
12. *Celebration* – focused on embracing life as a celebration, choosing activities and events for self and family, to encourage affirmation and enjoyment of relationships, and rewards of commitment and action.

Where is your current level of life satisfaction in each area? Figure 1 is a chart that may help you gain a glimpse of a Life Skill Satisfaction & Balance Wheel. My

clients use this in assessing their satisfaction in each area with their top ten core values.

Figure 1 Life Skill Satisfaction/Balance Wheel



You may score yourself numerically (1=lowest, 10=highest) to see those satisfaction gaps between where you are now and where you would like to be.

Right now, bring out your 3x5 core value card you created last week.

Then ask yourself these questions:

- When I read my top ten core values, how do they support these life skills and the level of satisfaction I see for myself?
- Do I see any gaps where I may need to reassess my core values related to those less satisfying life skill areas?

Set aside a couple hours of quiet time this weekend to consider three areas where you would like to improve your life satisfaction. Then write a letter of

commitment to yourself to take one action next week toward building greater synergy between your core values and that targeted life skill area. Keep your letter ever before you during this month. Do the same in the following weeks for the other two targeted life skill areas.

As the weeks and months roll by, remember, in any action you take reach for relationships that support your core values in the way you share your time, work, money, taking care of your possessions, wellness, meals, your children; how you have fun in recreation & entertainment; reflect on what is most important to you; and, of course, celebrating life in all the arenas of daily living.

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Your Neighbor—Making the Connection

Although family may be on the top of our relationship priority list, we sometimes forget that our neighbors impact our lives every day in some way. Whether we know who they are or not, we need to connect with our neighbors in order to experience true community. Making the connection isn't just borrowing a cup of sugar. So, do you know your neighbors next door? Are you thinking of moving into a new neighborhood?

There is an old Jewish proverb that says, "Ask about your neighbors, then buy the house." Although it might seem a bit nosy, it might just be a good idea to say hello before you buy. Yet, remember, those potential neighbors may just be checking you out too. G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) once quipped that "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people." I'm sure we have all, at least once, experienced this paradox at some time in our lives. Yet, no matter what neighborhood you live in, being the best neighbor possible should be a priority.

When do you know you have a great neighbor or that you are one too? Here are some quotes to think about when making the connection with your neighbor that creates community for everyone.

- Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up. G. K. Chesterton
- Don't buy the house; buy the neighborhood. Russian Proverb
- The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers. From *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King Jr.
- How much time he saves who does not look to see what his neighbor says or does or thinks. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121AD-180AD)
- Virtue is not left to stand alone. He who practices it will have neighbors. Confucius (551BC-479BC). The Confucian Analects
- Each man takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well—he has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
- The impersonal hand of government can never replace the helping hand of a neighbor. Hubert H. Humphrey (1911-1978)

These few somewhat humorous but profound quotes help us focus on setting appropriate boundaries, embracing common humanity and virtue, releasing judgments & obsessions, being an honest, good neighbor ourselves, and offering a helping hand. I am sure there are many simple, creative ways to become a good neighbor. Here are some possible ideas from e-How.com that are easy to do for us all:

1. Welcome new neighbors with an introductory note or a friendly chat.
2. Maintain the area around your home so that it's neat and attractive.
3. Be conscientious about noises that might disturb your neighbors, such as vacuum cleaners, music, loud talk and barking dogs.
4. End parties at a reasonable hour. While you're at it, invite your neighbors to come, too.
5. Return anything that you borrow from your neighbor, such as tools or appliances, as soon as possible. Express your gratitude when you do so.
6. Replace anything that belongs to your neighbor that you, your children, or your pets break or soil.
7. Respect your neighbor's privacy.
8. Offer to collect mail, water plants and watch the pets while your neighbors are away on a trip.
9. Learn from neighbors with cultural backgrounds different from your own.
10. Invite your neighbor over for a leisurely cup of coffee to discuss any problems you may have, or to share good news.
11. Throw a house party once a year on a weekend or holiday to socialize with your neighbors. [How about more often than once/year?]

Some tips and warnings were also offered when a problem between neighbors surface. First, respectfully approach your neighbor about the problem and request. If they do not appropriately respond to help solve the problem, try contacting neighborhood or community officials (i.e. rent board, landlord, homeowner's association, animal control).

If they still don't comply, consider calling the police if you think they are breaking the law with respect to you or your property. Yet, I would caution to involve the police only as a last resort. First try talking with your neighbor once more; then, if unsuccessful, ask for another neighbor or two to join you in requesting resolution with your neighbor. Then possibly get “officials” involved.

Just be sure “the problem” that is bugging you warrants this kind of response. Can you be comfortable living with it, particularly when your home is in a densely populated subdivision? If so, take a deep breath, smile, and send your neighbor flowers. You never know what a kind gesture can do, more than a perpetual complaint. And you never know what challenges are happening in your neighbor’s life that may need some compassion and patience on your part.

Remember, your desire and goal is to build enduring relationships in your neighborhood. So, find ways to connect with your neighbor that will build respect, trust, understanding, flexibility, and availability—resulting in surprising benefits far beyond what you would imagine for both you and your neighbor.

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Applying Your Core Values—Making Life More Satisfying Each Day

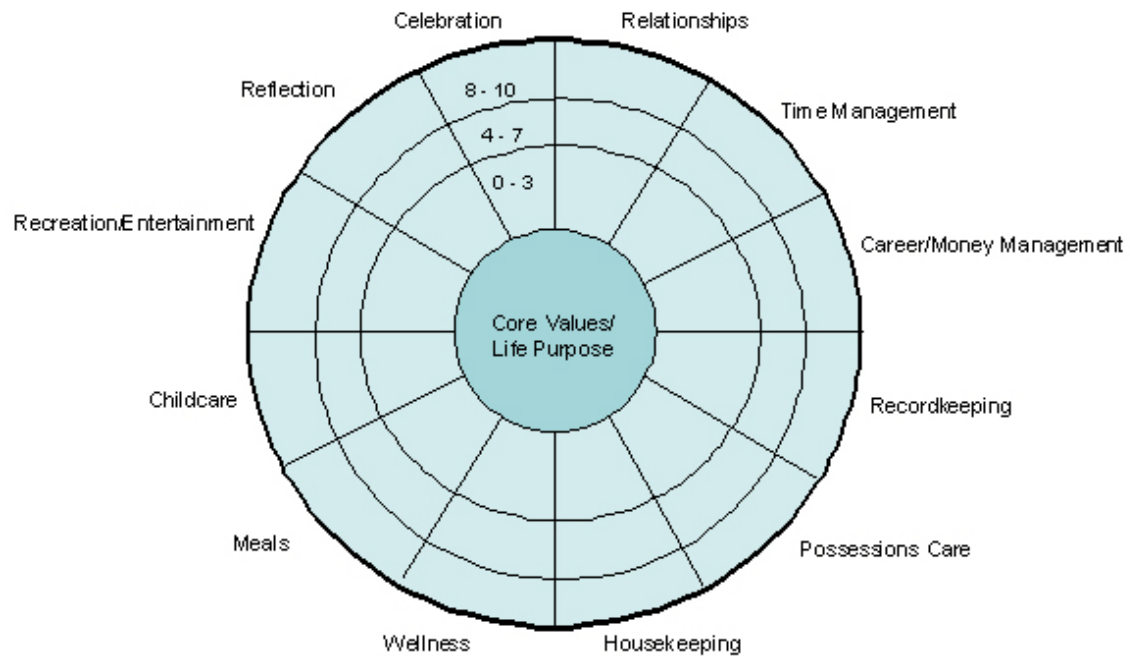
When you need to repair your car's transmission, a leaking faucet, go the doctor's, or have to work overtime for a week, how do you typically handle these routine occurrences? Do you take them in stride, knowing they are just a part of every day life? Or do you fuss and fume with every turn in the bend you need to make? Are you overwhelmed, worn out, confused about how to juggle it all? No matter where you are, let's take a closer look at how to apply your core values to those every day responsibilities and activities.

In the last two columns, core values and life satisfaction were covered. You were asked to write down your top ten core values on a 3x5 card, prioritized. Now that you have your ten core values, how do you make the connection with your every day responsibilities and activities? You may ask yourself, "Picking out ten core values is one thing, but how can I apply them to my every day life?"

At the request of one of my readers (thank you Diane!), I will try to expand on how you can apply your core values to those 12 life skills dimensions covered throughout the year—Relationship/Core Values being foundational to all others dimensions. Remember, in the last issue, there was a Life/Balance Wheel where you scored your life satisfaction level for each one (1=lowest, 10=highest). I

have included this wheel again to help you first focus on that one area of lowest life satisfaction. Then it is time to identify the gaps where your core values may not be as active in that life skill area for which you desire greater satisfaction. Once you see the gaps, you can then begin to create ways to apply your core values to that life skill, thereby raising your life satisfaction in that area.

Figure 1 Life Skill Satisfaction/Balance Wheel



To help you remember what each life skill dimension encompasses, here is a review of the brief descriptions of each.

- *Relationships/Core Values & Vision* – include all 4 realms of personal self, physical self (spirit, soul, body), others (family, friends, work, community), and societal systems (public/private entities, government agencies, institutions, organizations).

- *Time Management* – includes all one does during a daily 24 hour period.
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- *Celebration* – focused on embracing life as a celebration, choosing activities and events for self and family, to encourage affirmation and enjoyment of relationships, and rewards of commitment and action.

This exercise is a dynamic process of self-discovery about how you view each life skill dimension. When it comes to every day life in those less than satisfying areas, we may tend to avoid doing them as long as we can; or try to get them done as fast as possible, saving time but not the quality of care needed.

The way we build a bridge between our core values and every day responsibilities depends not only on our attitude, but also on our personality style, skill sets, and sometime how much is in our budget to hire out. How we order our time also plays an important role in using our time wisely while getting the job done well. And always keep in mind there are many possibilities for applying your core values, not just one or two. So, be creative as you move through the discovery process.

Here are the steps to take as you first focus on your lowest life satisfaction score area.

STEP:

1. Place your 3x5 card of your ten core values (prioritized and numbered) next to the Life Skill Satisfaction/Balance Wheel where you scored your level of satisfaction in each life skill area.
2. Read all ten core values out loud, meditating on each one as you recite them.

3. Review your satisfaction scores for the 12 life skill dimensions then focus for a moment on your lowest life satisfaction score area. Think about why the satisfaction score is so low in this dimension area. Write down your thoughts.
4. Next to each life skill word placed around the wheel (i.e. Relationships, Time Management, Career/Money Mgt, Recordkeeping, Possessions, Housekeeping, Wellness, etc.) write the corresponding number of those core values you believe apply in your daily life in that area (e.g. Relationships 1,5,7).
5. When you are finished with all twelve life skills, sit back and pause. What do you see?
6. What life skill area seems to have the greatest number of core values applied on a daily basis? The least number of core values?
7. Have the least landed on the life skill with the lowest life satisfaction score? If so, what do you think is missing? Spend some time here thinking about ways to incorporate more of your core values with that life skill area. Be practical and as simple as you can with any action you may want to take—one step at a time.
8. What one new action can you make this week to make it happen? Write it down in a commitment letter to yourself to keep handy for personal accountability. Ask a friend to help.

If you are one of those people that seem to have a high number of core values corresponding to your lowest satisfaction score, I encourage you to share your

thoughts with your family or a trusted friend. Explore together the paradox before you. You seem to see a high number of your core values expressed through that life skill (e.g. career/money management) but have little life satisfaction with it. Dig deep to discover the key that will resolve this paradox for you. You just might be pleasantly surprised at the discovery you experience.

Once you have moved through these eight steps on your lowest satisfaction skill, you can then move on to the other eleven awaiting you. Contemplate the next life skill you may want to improve your satisfaction score, and so on. I encourage you to take your time as you focus on each life skill through out the year. Applying core values is not a single event, but a life process of self-discovery about how you view those every day responsibilities and activities.

As you take this journey, your core values will sustain your motivation and life disciplines, with big payoffs in the years to come. Each discovery builds on the next creating greater synergy in your daily life and your life legacy for those you love. Then when you look back over the years, you will be fully satisfied with your journey.

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