

TOOL

Coaching Around Core Values



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Coaching Around Core Values

Elena always asks new clients to do the “Core Values” activity, usually during the first meeting, as it helps coaches understand a tremendous amount about who someone is and how they aspire to be in the world.

After engaging a client in this process (which you should go through, too!), we follow up with a bunch of questions. To be clear, we usually don’t ask all of these in the same conversation. We’ll pick and choose depending on what the client responds to.

The follow-up questions can include:

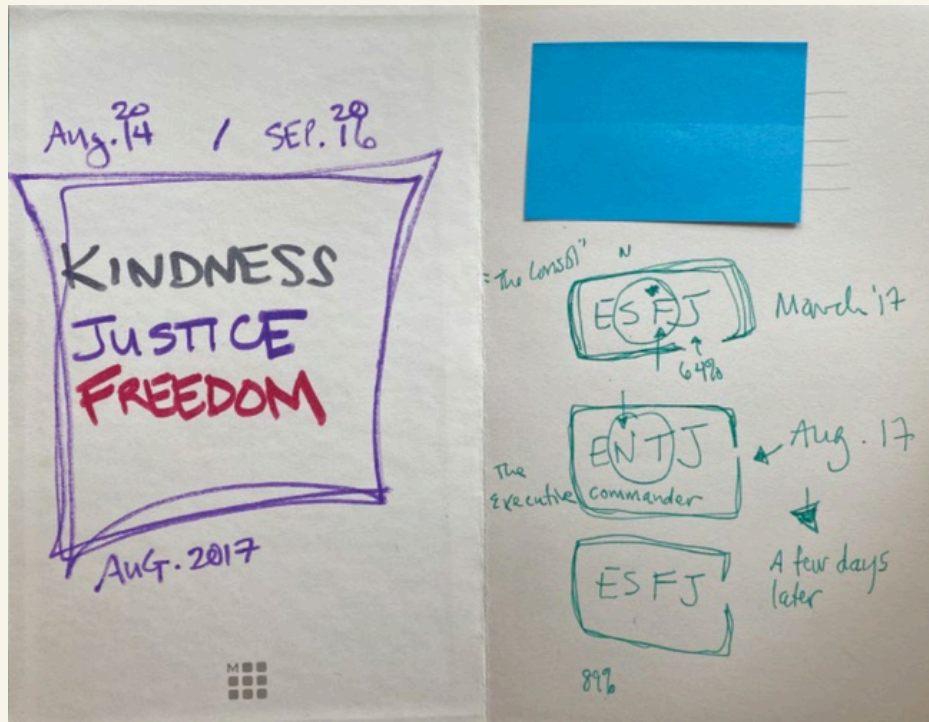
- What did it feel like to go through the elimination process?
- Where do you think your core values came from? Which experiences or people in your life contributed to this value being so important for you?
- Do you think your core values were different 5–10 years ago? Why or why not?
- What’s something you’ve done recently that has reflected one of your core values?
- Can you recall a time when you did something that conflicted with one of your core values? What happened? What might have played a role in making it hard for you to uphold a core value?
- Which of your values feels easiest for you to uphold on a daily basis at work?
- Given that our values are often aspirational, which of your core values feels hardest to embody regularly?

Knowing your client’s core values and understanding something about the significance of those values can be like seeing their guiding stars. Our core values are like our guiding stars, fixed in the sky even when we can’t see them. When you know your client’s core values, and you understand the significance of those values, you can orient your coaching to navigate by those values. Your client has determined where they want to go and who they want to be. Transformational Coaching is a journey you take your client on to help your client live their life and accomplish work in alignment with their values.

Elena always writes her client’s core values on the first page of her coaching notebook. In Figure 10.1 you’ll see what that looks like. You’ll also see that on that first page of her notebook she jots down the client’s Myers-Briggs type because she finds that invaluable in coaching.

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Figure 10.1: Elena's Coaching Notebook



When Elena prepares to meet with a client, she glances at this first page to remind herself of who they want to be, and she keeps the client's values at the forefront of her mind when she's in conversation. When a client expresses confusion or uncertainty about a decision they need to make, Elena often references one of their core values, asking a question like, "If you were going to make this decision based on a commitment to your core value of ____, what would you do?"

Often, reminding our clients of their core values is like clearing the clouds in their thinking, revealing the values to navigate by. Often this is all it takes to help clients know what to do. When a client is distressed about something, you might hear in their narrative that one of their core values was violated—either by someone else or by something they did. In those moments, you can say something like, "I know that kindness is one of your core values. It sounds like your [or their] actions may not have been demonstrating that value. Do you think that's contributing to your distress?"

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You can also reference a client's core values to help them recognize their growth and success. Whether a lesson goes well or flops, you can ask a teacher to reflect on how they stayed true to their values. That can help a teacher reframe what might have felt like a challenge ("We never finish the lesson!") through a strengths-based, core values-aligned perspective. If a teacher values process, community, and depth over breadth, she might overplan lessons and never finish them.

Finally, at the end of a school year, you can ask clients to reflect on their growth through the perspective of alignment to values. This can sound like:

- Can you share three instances this year when you intentionally acted on a core value?
- When did you make a decision that was based in one of your core values?
- Which value felt easiest to demonstrate this year and why?

When we act from our core values we feel good because we are acting with integrity. When we act with integrity, we feel authentic. And this authenticity is so important: We ache to be our true selves—and to have those true selves be accepted. Coaching around and toward core values is a powerful way to cultivate resilience and to help a client feel anchored in their truest self.

Practice

Practice using core values in three different scenarios.

Support a Client in Hard Times

Your client (a teacher) has three core values: family, responsibility, high expectations.

Scenario: The teacher is distressed because a student's mother met with the principal and complained that the teacher is too strict.

Which of the teacher's core values might be most relevant to the situation?

How does considering the teacher's values help you understand their distress?

What might you say to help the client make the connection between their distress and their core values?

Support a Client to See Strengths

Your client (a teacher) has three core values: justice, collaboration, joy.

Scenario: The teacher has been working on increasing student engagement and building strong relationships with students whose backgrounds are different from theirs.

It's the end of the first semester, and the teacher is reflecting on their growth in these areas. They are disappointed by benchmark assessment results and questioning whether they've been focused on the wrong things.

What could you ask them that would help them connect their core values to their reflection on the first semester?

How might they reflect on their growth through the lens of their core values?

How could you help them reflect on the benchmark assessments through the lens of their values?

Consider a Client You Are Currently Working With

Your client's three core values (if you haven't had a values discussion with them, you can try to identify their values):

How could engaging with the client about values move your work forward with them?

What might you say in your next meeting to engage with the client about their values and move your work forward with them?

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