



## **Value Sort Activity**

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*(45--60 Minutes)*

*Setting: Any size group, preferable facilitated in small groups of 10—15.*

*Materials Needed: One set of Leadership Institute Value Cards per participant*

Developed by Dan Gaken of the Central Michigan University Leadership Institute based upon Rushworth Kidder's text *How Good People Make Tough Choices*. Value listed on the Value Cards are derived from lists in the *LeaderShape Participant Manual* and [icarevalues.org](http://icarevalues.org).

### **TO BEGIN**

Allow your group to arrange itself in a comfortable fashion (this is an excellent opportunity for you to exercise your expertise as a facilitator—by now you should have developed great rapport with your participants, decide what is most suitable for them). Distribute the Values Cards. Allow them to spread the cards out, read them, and think about their meanings. Point out that each set of Value Cards contains four blank cards – this is not an accident. The cards are not meant in any way to be limiting, and that if they have values that are not reflected on the cards they are encouraged to add them.

Explain that we are going to afford them the opportunity over the next 45-60 minutes to explore their core values. Underscore that this is an insufficient amount of time to truly do this important inner-work, and that they should not feel frustrated if rushed—that only means that their homework should be to spend some serious time after this session for some introspective thought. This might be an excellent time for you to allude that CMU offers great opportunities, such as the LeaderShape Institute, that will allow them to dig deeper into this topic.

### **ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION**

Lead a brief (10 minutes or less) discussion about core values. Ask the group for responses to the questions

1. What is a value?"
2. "Is a core value different?"
3. "How do core values differ from organizational values?" "
4. Can organizational values be individual core values?"

Outline the key descriptors of individual core values (according to Rushworth Kidder in his book *How Good People Make Tough Choices*). According to Kidder, core values are:

1. Freely chosen (no one can tell you what you care about—these must be true to you)
2. Acted upon repeatedly (if this is truly a core value, not a value you aspire to own or think is what is publically acceptable, you will act repeatedly upon it, this is known as congruence)
3. Prized (you care about it, are proud of it, it is a part of you)
4. Verbalized Publically (as the late Senator George McGovern said, "No man should advocate a course in private that he's ashamed to admit in public." We share our core values with the world)

## **THE SORT**

Ask the group to look at their 48 Values Cards. Give them five minutes, at the end of which they must have reduced their set of cards to 24. The 24 “discarded” values should be placed by the participant into a trash can or recycle bin.

Be mindful of the time, give a one-minute warning, and be sure all have reduced their pile of cards in half in the allotted time.

Be sure to let them know that while they will be invited to share, this is a process to allow them to discern their core values for themselves. There are no right or wrong choices (remember, core values are freely chosen). However, if they like, they will be **invited** share.

At the conclusion of this five-minute round solicit responses to the following questions. Take about five minutes or less with this discussion. As you lead the discussion, take notes about their responses and listen for ways in which the participants rationalize value decisions.

1. Was this a difficult process, why or why not?
2. Would someone care to walk us through how you made the decisions you made?
3. What strategies did you use to reduce your Values Cards by half?
4. Where there specific values that you had difficulty getting rid of?
5. Where there values that you absolutely knew you would keep?

## **SECOND ROUND**

Explain to the group that we are going to repeat this exercise. This time they will again have five minutes, and they must now reduce the set of 24 Value Cards to 12.

At the conclusion of this second five-minute round solicit responses to the following questions. This round of discussion should also be approximately five minutes.

1. Was this process more or less difficult than the last round? Why?
2. Would someone care to walk us through how you made the decisions you made?
3. What strategies did you use to reduce your Values Cards by half?
4. How did these strategies differ from the first round?
5. If you are comfortable sharing, which values did you want to keep but ultimately had to discard?

## **THIRD ROUND**

At this point, they will know what's coming, but push on. Conduct a third round – again, provide them with a five-minute period in which they must reduce their 12 Value Cards by half. Watch this time to see if there is body language that corresponds to the exercise (frowning, running hands through hair, signs of stress, worrisome noises, etc.).

At the conclusion of this five-minute round solicit responses to the following questions. This round can move quickly.

1. What was difficult in this round?
2. Did it bother anyone that you had to physically throw away these values?
3. Did your strategy or approach to this differ from previous rounds.
4. Ask if the characteristics of core values played a role (i.e., I want to keep integrity, but I have trouble living it, so I discarded it in favor of . . . )

## **FINAL ROUND**

Conduct one final round of five minutes in which participants must select their three top values. Remind them of the characteristics of core values.

At the conclusion of this round lead a discussion of about ten to fifteen minutes centered around the following questions:

1. Why was this exercise challenging? (Look for someone to indicate that we asked them to make a choice between two or more values that they care for or like. This often sounds like "I had a hard time choosing between these two, I wanted to keep love, but I knew that faith was more important.")
2. Explain that we put their values in conflict with each other. We made them choose one in favor of another. Ask if this was an arbitrary exercise, or is this an accurate life simulation? In essence, does life make us choose one value over another?
3. The discussion can now center on situations where one's values are at conflict. To illustrate this, please have a personal story that you can share where your values were in conflict. (For example, if you value loyalty and integrity your values might be placed in conflict if a fraternity brother or sister does something to hurt another member of the community, you want to stay loyal to that brother or sister, but your integrity tells you the right thing to do is turn them in.)
4. Ask them if their perception of the connection between values and leadership has changed. Be sure to leave time for this discussion.

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