



McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)

MM2: How to Translate Values into Action

Practical strategies for translating values into committed actions

Values are things we care deeply about and are the basis for choices we make in life. They bring meaning to our lives. Values are not things we achieve or possess; they are more like directions we take in order to be a good person and have a meaningful existence.

To realize our personal values, we choose and pursue specific goals in life. Sometimes we manage to achieve these goals, sometimes they may not prove achievable, and we need to readjust. Indeed, values do not mean our life paths are always a predictable set course; there are many different paths that can lead to a meaningful life. What is important is that we choose to pursue goals that are consistent with our values in life, goals that bring us closer to the kind of person we want to be.

For instance, you may value being a loving person. When growing up, you may have had the goal to be protective towards your younger brother. Later you may have decided to join a charity. The importance of love as a personal value could also be a reason to have a partner and/or family. Whatever goals you set, whatever goals you manage to achieve, there is no end to this journey; there will always be more things you can do to be loving. Most people think they are successful when they achieve their goals. A different way to look at it is to think of success as living by our values. But for that, we need to always be aware of what our life values are.¹

What do you value and how do you express your values? How can you live your life closer to your values? Committed action means engaging in larger patterns of effective action that are driven and guided by core values. In order for committed action to be effective, you must be willing to be flexible as circumstances shift and change. The reason for being flexible is that it allows you to adapt to the inevitable changes of life while still being driven by your underlying values. No matter how many times your actions fall short, you can always take the time to reassess your behaviors and get them back in line with your values.

Knowing your true values, you can begin to set realistic goals based on those values. For example, if you value doing well in school, a concrete goal would be to study for a certain amount of time each day. Goals come and go as circumstances change and evolve, whereas values are a constant driving and motivating force for behaviors. Below are five suggested steps that can aid you in translating your cherished values to actions:

- **Choose a domain in your life that is high priority for change:** Introspectively, reflect on the different parts of your life and ask yourself *which of the current aspects of my life do I wish to initiate change within?* It could be work, parenting, family, spirituality, environment, social life, health, personal growth, leisure, education, romantic relationship, or community. Choose one or two only and write them down.
- **Choose which values you want to express in this part of your life:** What values would you like to express more in this area? For example, if you are working on your social life,

¹ Adapted from <https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Clarify-your-life-values.pdf>.



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maybe you would like to bring out how much you value having *fun* more or perhaps fostering more *connection*. So, choose and then write down which values you wish to express in this domain of your life.

- **Create specific goals that are guided by those values:** Here, you want to create goals that express your chosen value in your chosen life domain. *Something to keep in mind:* it is important that these goals truly express *your own authentic values* (as opposed to goals you think you ‘should’ do or goals that other people would like to see you do). If your goal energizes you and gives you a sense of meaning or purpose, you are on the right track. Good goals ought to be specific and time bound. Therefore, use specific language to write down your goal and so that you can measure achievements. In addition, a good goal is realistic. Aim to create goals that will nudge you outside of your comfort zone and help you grow, but at the same time are still within realistic reach. Goals that are not realistically achievable could set you up for disappointment, stress, and struggle.
- **Bring your values through action:** Start with a small immediate goal you can set. Something small and simple that you can easily achieve within the next day or two. Then perhaps adding in one or two sub-goals under each greater goal: short term, medium-term and long-term. Take some time to write up your action plan for values-based living, broken down into specific, realistic, value-driven goals. Goals for immediate action, short-term goals as well as your medium and long-term goals.
- **Take immediate action:** This is the most important step. Take action right now toward one of your ‘immediate goals’ as mentioned above. Perhaps you can add action steps into your planner, make a call, write an email, purchase a course or book online or maybe tell someone about your goal. Even the smallest act of living with purpose and intention in this way can feel empowering and uplifting. These small acts of taking control of your life and harnessing your inner resources are a statement of you acting in accordance with your own deepest nature... and that feels very good!

Finally, the larger goal of translating values into committed action is to live a meaningful and purposeful life, an intentional life that is inspired by your deepest heartfelt values. When your life feels out of balance or without direction, it is quite possible that those feelings are the result of being out of touch with your values or not behaving in accordance with your values. Once you bring into conscious awareness that which is most valued and treasured in your heart, you can begin to take steps towards translating those values into committed actions.



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II. Additional Resources on Translating Values into Action

- Building with Purpose: Learning to put values into action by Laura Yates
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KAKYE-1xWA> (12 min.) In this video Laura, who values and is passionate about environmental and personal health, discusses how she was able to translate her value through the building of “Tiny house” project. In this video she outlines the lessons and values she has learned throughout the process.
- Values and Committed actions in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6SIZEzKSNg&t=168s> (4 min.) while this presentation is intended for a therapist, there are very important lessons for anyone on how to identify and clarify values, how to commit to meaningful goals, and how to overcome obstacles that hinder achievements through actions.



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About this workshop:

Values are what we find meaningful and important in life. They guide our decisions and help us choose meaningful paths. Hence, the goal of this workshop is to equip participants with skills to be able to manifest their values through action.

Blurb: What do you value and how do you express your values? How can you live your life closer to your values? The larger goal of translating values into committed action is to live a purposeful, intentional life that is guided by your deepest values. For more on how to translate your values into action join us at MORSL as we seek to explore various strategies to translate our values into action.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this workshop, the participants should be able to;

- Outline with clear sense their underlying values.
- Identify various practical strategies to committed action.
- Create a personal plan for engaging their values in an activity.

Activity IV: Crafting your personal plan to translate values to action

Instructions:

Below are four suggested steps that can aid you in translating your cherished values to actions. Using the description in the handout provided, construct your own plan to translate your values into actions following these steps.



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WORKSHEET

I. Choose an area of your life that is a high priority for change:

II. Choose which value (s) you want to express in this domain of your life:

III. Create specific goals that are guided by those values:

IV. Then bring your values through action:

Take immediate action:



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To find additional Meaning Making
Workshop resources, visit our website:

