



## VALUE THIS!

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How big is your bottom line? What percentage of revenue is your partner draw? Which attorneys have reached their assigned billable goal? I could go on and on with the questions that get asked at the end of the year, and at each partner meeting, and they are often focused on specific points and data driven answers. When we add in the questions related to human performance, particularly those driven by "soft" skills, the room starts squirming and can't change topics fast enough. Just look at the process to get a performance evaluation done!

To move to a new place you must first know where you are. That's one version of suggesting that any road will get you there, if you don't know where "there" is. The same is true of leadership skills. If you don't know where you are today, moving forward is easy, and directionless.

Leadership skills are complex and layered. We've been talking about them in a series of articles, drilling deeper and deeper into your skills. Someone asked me recently about the difference between a good leader and a great leader. I think the distance between has a lot to do with self-awareness and emotional intelligence. When I execute well, develop processes and procedures, and react to problems and situations, I'm a good leader. Taking that to the level of greatness requires my focus to be bigger — seeing the vision for the future, and putting focus on my self-awareness. My goal is to grow and improve all the time.

This time around we are focused on values. Values are defined as our judgment of what's important. We discern our values over time, and we emulate conduct we determine as valuable. We also use values to frame our communications and to determine when we enter into conflict. Do you know anyone who enjoys conflict? I don't. And that accentuates how important the violation is that pushes us into conflict! So, values are a key component of leadership because they are rooted in self-awareness, communication, and conflict. What a trifecta!

Do you know what you value? Usually that answer is "YES"! I value my home, my safety, my family, my pets — things that come pouring out of the mouths of my friends and my clients. We have some clarity about the external influencers of our lives, and looking outward we can spy those things that have value in our lives. This is outward-in living, and works well for managers and good leaders in our law firms. It's a common lens from which we view the world, and being uncommon, or extraordinary, requires a different view.

Do you know what your values are? This question often results in a ScoobyDoo "arrrrrugh?" and a head tilt. We don't spend time in conversation expressing our values in an obvious and structured way. More often we

express values without naming them. For instance, let's say you identified a core value as authenticity. You aren't in conversation expressing, "well that's not authentic." More likely you say things like, "That's not how I see so-and-so at all." Or, "Just last week, Blah-de-Blah had the opposite reaction." These are statements that reveal your value of authenticity, but don't outright state it. And, many times we have spent so much effort in conversation about others, we haven't checked our own values to understand our own operating system.

You may have heard the expression, "leadership is an inside job"? Values are an inside job that develops leaders. I believe great leadership requires living from the inside out. Great leaders start by understanding themselves, and continually revisiting who they are and what they are focused on, checking their levels of influence and empowerment against decision making and autonomy.

So, values. They are showing themselves in your communications, are you clear in what they are? As you take on projects and look to "hire for fit", do you see where your values are impacting your listening, your questions, and your judgment? In fact, aligning your firm's values with your own is a critical step to employee engagement, which means YOU and the others in your firm.

Does your firm know its core values? How are they expressed? And how are they demonstrated? Do these two line up? Many times it is in this conversation where Administrators can identify a disconnect. "We say we have great client service, but we struggle to bill timely." This same disconnect distinguishes managers and leaders.

**VALUES.** A person's principles or standards of behavior. Thank you Mr. Webster. Here's a very small list of values to think about, and to choose from:

Achievement	Advancement	Creativity	Fun
Authenticity	Balance	Family	Relationship
Knowledge	Respect	Loyalty	Wealth
Courage	Integrity	Security	Wisdom
Power	Happiness	Spirituality	Community

These are only a handful of choices, and if you were to choose only two, which would top your list? The values conversation isn't easy, is it? If we are to continue to elevate our leadership game, this is an important step. I challenge you to listen. Listen first to others, well, because it's easier. What values do you hear them speaking?

Now get quiet and listen to yourself. What sends you into conflict? What value is at the root of it? Discover by uncovering your top 3-5 values and you'll have a strong sense of what drives you in your career, and in your life. Look for places where you are speaking them clearly, and for conversations that you could offer a richer dialogue about what is important to you.

I'd love to hear what you discover. And if you want the full exercise, email me. I'll send you a values clarification exercise to help you identify your values. I'll also know you are on your path to being the very best leader you can be, and that gives me a big smile.

For more information and further reading on Leadership, visit our [online library](#).



## JUDY HISSONG, CLM

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Judy understands teams. And she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, finance, and legal management to help law firms improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

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