

LIVING OUR VALUES GUIDE

A Bridge Between Vision and Practice



WE ARE LIVING IN A MOMENT OF TRANSITION, where long-standing systems are under strain and new ones are still taking shape. This is not a clean shift from one stable state to another, but a period where old and new logics coexist – often in tension.

In times like this, **bridge building matters**. When the future is not yet clear, progress depends less on having all the answers and more on how we move through uncertainty together. Bridge building is the work of navigating that in-between space, making choices that allow us to move forward without defaulting to old patterns that no longer serve.

This is where **living our values** becomes especially important. Every day, through our decisions, behaviors, and trade-offs, we are **practicing** a certain future. We are reinforcing ways of working, relating, and distributing power – sometimes intentionally, often without realizing it. This Guide and accompanying Workbook have been designed based on the notion that the future is shaped not only by long-term plans, but by the everyday choices we repeat until they become the norm.

A key question grounds this work: **What kinds of futures are we building through how we operate today?**

One practical way to engage in this bridge-building work is by aligning on the values that guide our daily choices – especially when the path forward is unclear or contested. Values act as scaffolding during transition: they help orient decisions, shape behavior under pressure, and provide shared reference points for how we show up, what we build, and how we navigate what comes next.

This document introduces a shared approach for living our values in times of transition. It is designed to help readers understand **why** values matter, especially during times of disruption; **how** to develop a set of practical values that are relevant to your organization today, and **what** they invite us to practice – individually, organizationally, and collectively.

For organizations and teams looking to actively apply this three-step approach in their own context, a separate [Living Our Values Workbook](#) provides structured exercises, worksheets, and examples.

WHAT ARE VALUES?

Why values matter in practice

In moments of transition, values are often invoked but not always examined. We talk about values as ideals, but less often as the everyday choices, trade-offs, and behaviors that shape how work actually gets done.

In this guide, we treat values not as abstract statements, but as living commitments that move from intention to practice. Understanding how values translate into principles and behaviors is what allows them to guide action – especially under pressure.

A NOTE ON VALUES UNDER PRESSURE:

We know tough trade-offs and tensions are inevitable.

Pressure reveals values. These are the moments when our choices define us – when living our values interferes with ego, influence, control, money, or security.

Actively living values requires unlearning, self-awareness, and courage. It means facing discomfort, having hard conversations, and making different choices when the easier path is available.

These moments are not failures; they are the real tests of transformation.

By naming these moments from the start, we prepare ourselves for the reality that transformation is not tested by what we say in calm waters, but by what we choose in the storm.



Values > Principles > Behaviors

Each core value moves from aspiration to action.



Core Values

name what matters most; our core values are paired with a value statement, a brief sentence that explains the essence of the value.



Principles

are the guiding truths that help us apply our values, guiding our behaviors, decisions and leadership.



Behaviors

are the actions, habits, and cultural patterns that make up how our principles show up in daily life. These are divided into:

- **Everyday Commitments** – practices that anchor our work under normal conditions.
- **Values Under Pressure** – practices that matter most when it is hardest to live our values. How this value is lived when it is hardest to do so.

Once we understand values as living commitments – expressed through principles and behaviors – the next question becomes practical: ***How do we work with them in real time, especially in moments of uncertainty or transition?***



A THREE-STEP APPROACH TO LIVING YOUR VALUES

Organizations and individuals may apply this approach in different ways, but the process generally unfolds in three intentional stages.

STEP 1

Confirm Your Core Values

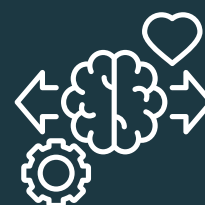
Values must be relevant, known, and actively lived to be useful.

Many organizations technically have values listed somewhere (often on a website or in an onboarding deck) but that does not mean those values are still relevant, widely understood, or guiding daily decisions.

This step invites organizations and individuals to:

- reflect on whether existing values still serve their current reality,
- revisit who was involved in shaping them (and who was not), and
- clarify which values, principles, and behaviors are truly needed now.

The goal is not to adopt these values wholesale, but to adapt, refine, or rearticulate values that can meaningfully guide action in times of transition.



STEP
2

Identify the Gaps

Once values are clarified, the next step is to understand how they are actually showing up in practice.

This involves naming:

- where current behaviors and systems align with stated values,
- where tensions, contradictions, or trade-offs exist, and
- where there is a gap between current behaviors and desired practices.

Values are revealed under pressure.

When the going gets tough, which will you choose – comfort or courage? Control or solidarity? Expedience or integrity?

Living values is not abstract. It costs us something: ego, security, power, or money. That is when transformation becomes real.



STEP
3

Live the Values in Practice

Across TIME's work, we've seen that ***the process is the intervention***. How organizations choose to integrate values – who is involved, what tensions are surfaced, and how accountability is handled – is as important as the values themselves.

That's because values become real through systems, processes, behaviors, and relationships.

This step focuses on developing practical plans for:

1. Embedding values into:
 - a. organizational policies and processes,
 - b. leadership habits and decision-making,
 - c. culture and relationships,
 - d. accountability and feedback structures, and
 - e. everyday ways of working – especially when doing so is difficult or costly.
2. Living values under pressure.
3. Building in the support, structures, and culture to ensure everyone is accountable.



Here are some examples of areas where values can be integrated into organizational systems:



Hiring & Onboarding

- Values-based interview questions
- Values alignment in rubrics
- Real scenarios during onboarding



Performance & Development

- Values-based performance prompts
- Promotion tied to lived values
- 360 feedback on behaviors (not traits)



Governance & Decision-Making

- Value checks during decisions
- Transparent delegation of authority
- Annual values audits



Wellbeing & Culture

- Reflection spaces
- Collective pause practices
- Psychological safety aligned with dignity & equity

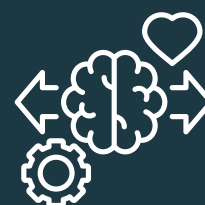
WHAT FUTURE ARE WE BUILDING?

Every choice we make today rehearses a future.

So ask yourself: What future am I building through my choices today?

Living our values is not about perfection, and it is not a one-time decision. Instead, it is an ongoing practice shaped by trade-offs, constraints, and moments of pressure. The work is rarely neat or complete. What matters is our ability to notice patterns, make intentional choices, and keep aligning practice with purpose over time.

This Guide offers one way to orient ourselves in that work. For organizations and teams ready to move from reflection into application, the Living Our Values Workbook provides practical exercises, worksheets, and tools to help put these ideas into practice in your own context.





ABOUT HUMENTUM

Humentum helps unlock effective nonprofit management. With over 300 learning offerings, a solutions-focused membership platform, and deep consulting experience in funding and finance; governance, compliance, and risk; and leadership and strategy, Humentum has strengthened thousands of NGOs, nonprofits, and their funders across the globe to become more resilient and sustainable.



ABOUT TIME

The TIME Transformation Lab is a collaboration-based initiative led by Humentum that brings together INGOs, CSOs, networks, and funders to explore and test what transformation looks like in practice. TIME helps actors navigate disruption and possibility by creating spaces for reflection and experimentation, and by co-creating practical tools that strengthen resilience, equity, and organizational change. Its learning spreads through networks and new contexts, creating ripple effects across the sector. Through its **Working Out Loud** approach, TIME shares insights in real time so others can adopt, adapt, and apply them.

To stay connected to this work, [sign up here](#).