

## **IS SOLO WORK FOR YOU? CORE VALUES PROVIDE COMPASS IN MAJOR CAREER CHANGE**

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There was a time when it was rare – and for some even unthinkable -- to consider going out on your own to work independently. Times have changed considerably as a growing rank of smart, experienced, talented and highly marketable professionals are trading in big titles and corporate jobs for the privilege of saying “I work for myself.”

The rewards of working solo can be plentiful. My own experience in the last 7 years as an independent communicator, and more recently also as a professionally-trained career/life coach has been filled with exciting work, great clients, and loads of personal and professional growth. But with the rewards also come unique challenges -- and for some, occasional bouts of doubt and uncertainty.

Making the transition to independent work can be exciting but scary too. How do you know if it's for you? What kind of solo biz type are you? What are you willing to give up? What in your new venture will be most important to you? How will you best leverage your strengths and manage within your limitations?

These are important questions and for anyone considering the leap to the independent work life, know this: As a solo practitioner you become Chief Executive Officer of “Me Inc.” Your biz will be a reflection of who you are. The better you know yourself the better you can answer these and other key questions that will help you build a business that works for you.

Kevin Cashman, author of *Leading from the Inside Out*, defines Leadership as “authentic self expression that creates value”. Well as CEO of Me Inc. leadership skills are what you want! Your survival, in any work context, is about providing value –especially when you are about to hang up your own shingle. What's your unique contribution and is that aligned with who you authentically are?

According to Cashman, one of the most powerful tools of an effective leader is self awareness. I agree – and knowing your **core values** is a great starting point if you are going to lead effectively in your new business and in your own life.

### **Core Values: What are they?**

Core values are not things you think you *should* do. You don't choose or develop them. You discover them. Think of core values as a reflection of who you truly are at your most authentic self – something like the “DNA” of your character, revealing what's most important to you. The idea is that when your life is in congruence with your core values, you will be most fulfilled and likely most effective. Conversely, when you are

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dissatisfied or frustrated, it's likely that one or more of your core values are not being honoured.

The core value concept applies for both work and in your personal life. After all, real you is real you. Anywhere.

If freedom, for instance, is a strong personal core value then you'll likely flourish in work that provides a degree of flexibility and freedom. Without it you may feel frustrated or perform sub-optimally. Solo work provides lots of freedom – but many traditional jobs can as well.

If community and belonging are important values to you then working solo may be lonely. It doesn't mean you can't work solo -- but you'll need to find ways to affiliate either in your work world and/or personal life (hint: join AIP to network with other solo practitioners).

If building and creating are important values you may get a charge out of starting a new business. If growth is your mantra then staying small won't be enough. For those with a strong mastery value, it's the craft and quality of the work that matters most and maybe staying small will be just fine. If integrity and honesty are paramount, you'll need to work for and collaborate with those who share that same value.

Innovators need to innovate. Creators need to create. Builders need to build. The list of possible values and permutations is infinite. That's why we are each unique.

The point is to get to know your own unique set of core values. What makes you tick? What gets you out of bed in the morning excited about your work – and your life? What conditions must be in place for you to thrive? What brings you down (usually an indication that core values are being compromised)?

Core value awareness is a powerful compass for your work and life. With it, you make more meaningful choices that are aligned with who you are. Isn't that an empowering condition for living, working and contributing your best?

So if you are about to make a significant work or life change, don't forget this important compass. It's a tool you don't want to leave home or work without.

### **SIDE BAR: Tips on how to explore your Core Values**

- Work with a professionally-trained coach who can help you identify and clarify your core values and then put it into the context of where you are and where you want to go.
- Or on your own: Think of 3-5 peak moments in your life when you felt completely in flow, engaged and most excited about life. Write out as much detail about these moments – how you felt, what was most important, what you'd like more of from

these moments in your life. Then consider what themes you see. Conversely, consider a few moments when you were frustrated or not fulfilled. What was missing? This kind of reflection can help you get connected to what's most important to you.

- From this reflection, write out the words that capture what you think those values are. Prioritize them. Consider how they show up in your life – and what happens when they are not being honoured.