

What are you voting for?

Values and Beliefs

Voting in a General Election is, for many of us, a highly significant event. It's an opportunity to influence the way our country is governed and it's an expression of our values and beliefs, whichever way we vote.

Values and beliefs are at the core of personality and it's the combination of our values and beliefs that provide the motivation for daily activity. Most of our behaviour is driven in this way. We do what we do in order to get what matters to us.

Technically, the difference between values and beliefs is this:

Your **VALUES** are what's important to you

Your **BELIEFS** are what's true for you

Often, beliefs and values are outside of conscious awareness. We don't always know what is important to us or what is true for us until faced with a situation that challenges our beliefs or violates our values.

The connection between values and emotions

The reason these kinds of situations are so illuminating is that they stir up emotion. There is a strong connection between values and emotions – you will feel negative emotions when your values are challenged or violated and feel positive emotions when your values are fulfilled.

In a situation where your values are being violated – by yourself or by someone else – you will typically feel irritated,

frustrated, annoyed, angry or sad. So, you can become more aware of your values by asking yourself, when you feel these emotions, 'Why do I feel this way?'

Conversely, when your values are fulfilled, when you get what's important to you, you'll feel good. You'll feel happy, satisfied, relieved, triumphant or excited and again, you can become more aware of your values by asking yourself, when you feel these emotions, 'Why do I feel this way?'

In situations where you feel nothing, or are bored, disengaged, lethargic or apathetic, this is usually a sign that you are not aware of any connection between the opportunities offered by the situation and any of your values. There is quite literally no motivation to take action. So, one way to overcome that lack of motivation and drive is to deliberately seek a connection between the opportunities presented and one of your values.

This is also important for leaders and managers – to engage your people you need them to make the connection between the activity you want from them and their own values.

Beliefs relate to values

When we start to explore this area in detail, we find that values and beliefs cluster together. Each value will have a set of beliefs associated with it. These are accumulated as we go through life. Early on, we pick up the values and beliefs of our parents, teachers and other influential adults. Later, we make our own beliefs on the basis of our own experience.

It's quite usual that the beliefs one person has relating to a specific value might be different from those of another person.

For example, in the run-up to this General Election, all Parties have been campaigning around similar issues. When it comes to the economy and recovery from the global recession there are different ways of tackling the problems and different ways of balancing the budget.

There has been a lot of talk about 'fairness' in the way that taxation and pensions are structured. Fairness is a value. It's a value that lots of people hold and so it's a good way of creating rapport – to demonstrate that you share that value.

However, when we get into the details of how that fairness is to be achieved, then we bring in the beliefs that support the value and it's here that we find differences. One person may think that it's 'fair' that everyone pays the same rate of tax. Another may think that it's 'fair' that people who earn more should pay a higher proportion of their income in tax. Someone else may think that it's 'fair' that some people on low incomes should pay no tax at all.

But these are not the beliefs. To find out the beliefs that drive this thinking, you have to ask 'Why is that fair?' And then you'll start to get to the underlying assumptions. Maybe not straight away, you'll need good rapport and a certain amount of questioning to get to what they really believe. You'll know that someone is telling you their beliefs by certain non-verbal markers:

Total congruence – this is TRUE for them
Simple language – this might have been learned at a very young age
A 'doesn't everybody know that?' tone or voice and expression

When you notice these signs, take care. When someone expresses their deeply-held beliefs, they are not usually very open to other points of view. Show respect for their beliefs and you'll retain their trust and respect in return.

This is why it used to be said that in polite company you should not talk about politics or religion – these are matters of belief and no amount of debate will change what someone truly believes. Clashes of beliefs and values can cause bitter arguments and can be hard to resolve.

Shared values and beliefs are often the basis of lasting relationships, both personal and professional.

So, if you want an interesting way to pass the time while you wait for the election results to come in tonight, you could start asking some of your friends and family why they voted the way they did...

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