

### Understanding Values By Adrian Savage, President of PNA, Inc.

Understanding potential begins with understanding values. Our values are the source of all motivation and energy. They propel us towards what feels right and useful and away from anything that does not. Because people have choice about what they do and where they pay attention, trying to force them to act against their values never works for long. Only the strongest pressures will make it work at all. The old saying that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink applies fully to realizing potential. Even if you demonstrate the presence of unused potential, if using it is not in line with a person's values, he or she will not respond.

PNA's NetTPS Values Module looks at two key types of values: those that are attached to an outcome (you value getting something to happen); and those that are attached to how you behave (you value acting a certain way or being seen as someone who does). We call the first set of values "goals" and the second set "motivations."

For each set of values, NetTPS pinpoints three important patterns:

1. *Core Values* are central to how people see themselves. In a sense, they define who people are in their own view. Core values have probably been present for many years and have a profound influence on behavior. People do not willingly violate their own core values, save in utmost need, or allow others to violate their core values for any length of time.
2. *Hot Buttons* are triggered by specific events or circumstances. Most of the time these values are quiet and unobtrusive, but when triggered they typically take over and direct all behavior. Hot buttons carry a strong emotional charge when activated, so the resulting behavior tends to be emotional and extreme. You know you were operating under the influence of a hot button when you regret what you did or said the moment you cool off. We all have hot buttons; you see them when people start to call things "matters of principle" or get suddenly angry over something that seems quite unimportant.
3. *Blind Spots* are values about which we have almost no strong feelings. Mostly we feel neutral or slightly negative about them. They do not appear on our radar screens. We ignore options that might come from exploring them. We treat the views or actions of others that touch on our blind spots as irrelevant, eccentric or mildly tedious. You cannot hear from a blind spot, so if someone tries to communicate with you from that value, you don't hear what they are saying. It also works the other way round. If you try to communicate with someone and pick a blind spot for them, they will act as if they cannot understand it. Typically we think such people are dumb! In fact, we are the dumb ones for failing to try to communicate from somewhere else.

Values are the cornerstone of development. They are quite different from attitudes and beliefs. Both need an object: you must have a belief or an attitude **about** something or **against** something. Values do not need a specific object. They work like an organizing principle that allows us to give meaning to our experience and put it into some kind of order. Your values produce what feels to you to be the natural order to your experiences, putting them into hierarchies of importance, interest, relevance and worth.

Our own values are always “right.” You cannot hold a value that you think or feel is “wrong.” Not only are they right, they are right without question. This gives them huge emotional power. People feel deeply hurt when their values are violated or ignored. They become excited and engaged when something fits with their values. Sometimes people with very strong values can become quite righteous about them, responding with disdain to anyone who even seems to question them.

Whatever our background, we form a view of life that mostly consists of values and beliefs. Based on our view, we decide what we can and cannot do. We also decide what is important and valuable to us and what is worthless.

Values form links in the memory. We have had many pleasant experiences in our past. We have seen success and failure. Out of these we have build a pattern of values that we expect will increase the number of pleasant things in our lives and prevent the unpleasant ones. Values – especially hot buttons – work to lock in the memory of sensations and emotions from the past. This network of recollections colors present perceptions and produces reactions that may not be appropriate.

Being praised for something and punished for something else leaves traces in the memory. If the experience is vivid enough, those traces are powerful influences on our lives. They automatically draw us towards what we recall as pleasant and propel us away from what we expect to be unpleasant. If something has left no mental trace, we see it as neutral and rarely give it any attention.

Understanding values increases choice and awareness. It is not some esoteric area. It is something anyone can do to add to their success.

#### **About the Author**

Adrian Savage co-founded the forerunner of PNA, Inc. ten years ago to clarify the way people view employee and organization potential. Mr. Savage drew on a background in senior management positions in diverse organizations. He used his experience with complex organizational structures to develop fresh ways of understanding what allows companies to achieve optimum performance. This visionary believes that employees can align themselves more successfully with their commitments and the opportunities available to them by exploring their unused talents and fundamental values.

#### **About PNA, Inc.**

PNA is the home of The Potentia System (TPS), a qualitative diagnostic approach that produces a clear picture of potential in individuals, teams and organizations. TPS is based on three key principles: exploring future possibilities, reawakening deliberate choice and working from strength. Companies that use TPS focus on understanding and maximizing the potential in individuals, teams and organizations as an essential element of leadership and an effective and proven approach to creating positive change. The techniques of TPS have been in development and use for more than 15 years throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia and the Far East.

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