



## Unit: Principles, Ethics and Values for Leadership

**Skill 4: Defining A “Principled” Leader****Activity A: What Are Principles And Values****Activity Skills:**

Small group discussion and decision-making.

**Leadership Skills:**

Understanding what principles and values are, and how they influence the decision-making process and the tone of leadership.

**Suggested Level:**

Beginning

**Time:**

30-40 minutes

**Supplies needed:**

- Paper.
- Pens or pencils.

**Do Ahead:**

- Copy worksheets.

**Source:**

Developed by:  
Rory Klick  
UW-Extension

Based On: Principle-Centered Leadership, by Stephen R. Covey

**BACKGROUND:**

What guides you in life as you make your decisions? Do you have a roadmap? A compass? In fact, you do! The roadmap that you turn to when you need direction is your system of values. The compass that tells you whether things are right or wrong is your principles.

What does this mean? To illustrate this idea, let's think of some examples. If you have to choose between watching a big game on TV or helping a good friend move, the roadmap that helps get you to your end decision is the value you have for friendship. The compass inside you that tells you if you are doing the right thing is your core principle of treating others as you want to be treated.

Sounds a little corny maybe, but it works. If you are lost and you have a map and a compass, you can always find your way. It is the same for our decision making process; if you feel confused, what do you fall back on to help you make the choice? “Okay”, you say, “I see where this is going”. But where do you get your values and principles? Like most things, they are learned; from your family, your school, your community, your friends and so on. We come to value and believe things through our experiences.

What do values and principles have to do with leadership? The values and principles of a group or organization tend to take on the values and principles of its leadership. As a leader, you set the tone for how things work and how decisions are made. Leaders must ask not only what they have as their personal system of values and principles, but what they want as the system to guide decision making and behavior within their organization.

Stephen Covey is a noted author and leadership expert, and has written extensively about leadership principles. He defines 4 levels of principle-centered leadership – personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational. First we have to know our own personal values and principles, then those that guide how we relate to others, next how we manage or empower others, and finally how we lead many. The decisions we make always come back to our basic roadmap of values and our internal compass of core principles. Where do we find this roadmap and compass? Let's put our values and principles to work a bit.

**WHAT TO DO:**

Have participants break into small groups of 3-6 people. Each group will review a list of scenarios and determine their decision about how to handle the situation. Each group must have one recommended response to the situation – even if individuals feel differently. Then groups will name the values and principle that guided their choices. Allow 10-15 minutes for this section, and then reconvene to discuss the

## Skill 4: Defining A “Principled” Leader

### Activity A: What Are Principles And Values

**Notes:**

results.

#### **TALK IT OVER:**

##### ***Reflect:***

- How did you group do deciding how to respond to the situations?
- Were people generally in agreement about how to react?
- If so, why? If not, how did you resolve various approaches to come up with only one group response?
- What values and principles did you identify that helped guide you?
- Is it hard to distinguish between principles and values?
- Did going through the identification of the values and principles change your thoughts about how to respond?

##### ***Apply:***

- Have you had a decision to make in life that was difficult? What guided you?
- How do we tend to make simple decisions more difficult?
- Do you convey your principles to others? How?
- As a leader, do you find yourself relying on your core principles to make decisions?
- Who are some leaders that have shown great clarity of values and principles?
- Why do leaders set the tone for a group or organization?

#### **BEYOND THE BOX:**

##### ***Optional Homework:***

Have participants write a paragraph or two about their personal “compass.” What are your core principles, and how do you determine your “true north” to guide you through difficult situations and decisions?

##### ***Resources and Web Links:***

Stephen R. Covey. 1992. Principle-Based Leadership. Simon & Schuster, New York.

[www.nwlink.com](http://www.nwlink.com)