



## 8-Step Guide to Identifying & Codifying Your People Principles

**Step 1.** Go for a fifteen-minute walk and reflect upon your career up until now. Think about the people and organizations you've worked for; employees you've admired; and managers, bosses or leaders that you've been in contact with. Then ask yourself this question: *What positive or negative work experiences do I recall and why do these stick in my mind?*

**Step 2.** Find a quiet space. Turn off your phone and get out a blank piece of paper and a pen. *Do not use an electronic device.*

**Step 3.** Using the grid below as a template, consider the regular interactions you have with people and how you act in those situations. Your work interactions will likely fall into one of the five (5) categories I have included, but feel free to add other categories that make sense to you.

Category	What It Sounded Like	Experience "Driver"	Possible Principle
Interviewing / Hiring			
Routine Interactions (managing people, meetings, goals, etc.)			
Coaching & Development			
Difficult Conversations			
Employee Departures			

**Step 4.** Recall a specific interaction that you've had with an employee or coworker that falls within a category. What is the most important thing that you either: a) said to them; b) think you said to them, or c) wish you said to them. Write that down in Column 2 and be as succinct as possible. (1-2 sentences).

**Step 5.** Think about your interaction with this person and why you said what you did. Is there a specific instance in your career (or life in general) that you think may have influenced or shaped how you communicated with the individual? Jot down a note about that memory in Column 3.



**Step 6.** Looking across the first row, think about what you said, what your experiences in this “area” have been, and how the specific situation and your life experiences might have created an unexamined People Principle.

Here’s an example of how this might look:

Category	What It Sounded Like	Experience “Driver”	Possible Principle
Employee departure	A key employee walked into my office and resigned. I thanked them for their service, let them know they’ve done great work for us, wished them all the best in the future, and we held a goodbye lunch two weeks later.	In a previous job, the management was paranoid. When employees resigned, almost all were shown the door that very same day and treated like old garbage.	Every employee will eventually leave you. Treat them well when they depart.

**Step 7.** Repeat steps 4-6 for each category, adding sub-rows or new categories as needed.

**Step 8.** Take all of your People Principles from Column 4 and create a separate list. Print this list and place it on your desk or somewhere that you will see regularly. Periodically review the list and consider your principles when new experiences within each category arise. Take note of your behavior and whether it’s consistent with your People Principles. Return to this exercise as needed to reinforce and refresh your Principles.

Now that you have your list of People Principles, it’s time to be brutally honest with yourself. Are the Principles you listed truly yours or are they an idealized version of what you think they should be? Here’s an example of what I mean:

One of your Principles might sound like this: *“Employees are valuable individuals, and we’re grateful to have them on loan from their families.”*

If you truly feel this way, fantastic! If, however, a part of you instead wants to say, *“People that work here should be grateful to have a job with our company,”* then that’s your real Principle.

I can’t tell you which of those two Principles accurately reflects your perspective—that’s for you to decide. I can, however, counsel you to consider how that People Principle affects the people you work with and your legacy as a leader.