



LIFE MAPS: POWERFUL TOOLS TO INCREASE SELF AWARENESS AND SELF ESTEEM

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Whether in my facilitation work with companies and groups or in my coaching work with individuals, one of the most popular, powerful and passionate exercises is the History Map / Life Map.

Early Experiences with History Maps

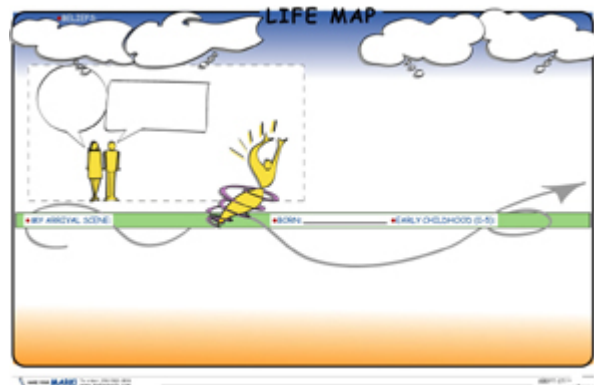
I began my work with History Maps as an employee of the pioneering group graphics firm, [The Grove Consultants](#), in San Francisco. They would map out the history of an organization: mostly really big companies like Visa, HP, Sun Microsystems and GM. Most of these maps would be custom drawn murals: 16-24 foot long monsters that would depict the 'genesis' story of the founder, the many twists and turns of their evolution, leading up to their present-day dilemmas about growth, complexity, changing environment, etc.

After seeing the big picture drawn out in this way, people (leadership, employees, shareholders, customers, partners, etc) had a better, intuitive understanding of the company and how they fit into it. Increasing their ability to talk rationally about their past and make decisions for their future.

Moving into Life Maps

While I was involved in corporate History Maps by day, I began experimenting with personal Life Maps during the night and weekends --- drawing out my own maps, and doing the same for friends and colleagues. With large sheets of paper on the wall, I would draw out their life stories, beginning with their arrival scene (their birth), and working through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood --- right up to their present moment.

Like the organizational maps, people find the individual mapping process to be cathartic and helpful --- even profound or sacred. It helps you step back and appreciate your life story from a witness perspective. See the flow of your evolution. Your high points and low points. The people, places, things, events and activities that have shaped your life.



See What and How You Are Creating:

The graphic approach takes oral storytelling up a notch --- one gets to literally SEE their story, however one might be telling it at that point in time. As a consultant and coach this visual documentation is invaluable. It is a record of how my clients view themselves, their story and their life. Also, as thoughts, at a very deep level (and sometimes not so deep!), create our realities, the Life Map helps people see how they are creating their reality, by observing the thoughts and meaning that they apply to what they've been through. When standing back and looking at their full story, they begin to see patterns and gather insights. Awareness of these things being a first step in adjusting and reprogramming to create more of what they do want.

Catch & Release:

Life Maps are great for catching insights and ahas and for turning one's attention to what they have received and what they are grateful and appreciate of --- a prerequisite for personal visioning and planning work. They also serve as great communicate tools to explain and share one's journey with important others (friends, mates, children, counseling professionals, etc).

These maps are also good for releasing: identifying and letting go of the things (attitudes, patterns, people, places, etc) that no longer serve. Some of my clients choose to use their maps in a symbolic or ritual kind of manner --- burning, shredding or disposing of them in some other kind of fashion (one client reported she threw hers off of Golden Gate Bridge – not the most environmentally friendly option, but definitely dramatic!).

Clearing the Slate:

Life Mapping is an effective (and I think essential) activity for clearing the slate for personal visioning and planning work. Often people need perspective and context before they can contemplate options for their future. The Life Map allows a nod to the past, but also sets the stage for more. The process naturally leads up to the present moment --- to the 'what's next for me?' considerations. The future does not need to be constrained by the past. However, acknowledging and accepting the past (and putting it in its rightful place) clears the air for more empowered creating. So one's future is more a product of what one wants now as opposed to just being an extension of what one has already had --- A powerful and clean place from which to launch and receive new desires!

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See [SHIFT-IT Self-Coach Tools / Mini-Manuals](#) for handy step-by-step directions on how to create your own Life Maps, includes five color maps and downloadable booklet.

WANT TO USE THIS ARTICLE IN YOUR E-ZINE OR WEB SITE? You can, as long as you include this blurb with it: Christina Merkley, "The SHIFT-IT Coach" is creator of the SHIFT-IT Graphic Coaching Process. To learn more about SHIFT-IT, Graphic Coaching and Personal Visioning and Planning, visit <http://shift-it-coach.com>