

TRANSITIONS

Sustaining Social Change

Life Maps

Taking a moment to map out your life journey up to this point can reveal things about yourself and your life that can help you understand how you are reacting to the present change, what resources you have used to manage past transitions, and where your journey might lead next. Not understanding how the present change fits within your life sometimes makes it harder to adapt to.

For this exercise, find your inner artist and have fun. Use crayons, markers, pastels, or other media that allows you to use colors, texture, or shading to express things visually that you might have a tough time expressing with words. Symbols and short phrases are allowed. Use a large sheet of paper - 2 ft. x 3 ft. is ideal - to draw out as much information about your life path as you can.

Here are some suggestions for what to include in your map:

- Times where you felt you lost your way, got stuck, ran out of gas.
- People who gave you directions, filled your tank, or fixed a flat tire.
- Special tools you found to help you find your way back to the road, fix your car, or get yourself unstuck.
- Crossroads where you faced a big decision and made a significant choice.
- Side roads that were attractive, but that you didn't let yourself explore.
- Sharp curves where you changed your direction completely. (Were you steering around an obstacle, or did you suddenly discover a new destination?)
- Places where you found yourself back where you started or dead ends where you had to retrace your route.
- Destinations you were headed for -- before you decided to bypass them and just keep going.
- Swamps and deserts.
- Washouts, detours and roadblocks.
- Steep grades that were difficult to climb, or downhill stretches where you had to ride the brakes to keep from wiping out.
- Times when you found yourself driving in cruise control or really enjoying the ride.
- The sites of wonderful experiences ("points of interest," as they're called on the highway)

Source: *The Way of Transition*, William Bridges (Perseus, 2001)

Application to Mentoring

True Colors, Inc. (TC), an organization that provides mentors for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth, uses Life Maps in mentor trainings as a way for mentors and youth to reflect on their relationship.

TC has found the exercise is a valuable way to prepare mentors for the reflection and sharing that they will be called to do with their mentees. Mentors complete the exercise a second time with their mentees to help them get to know one another, establish trust, and share ways in which they, too, have struggled through life changes. Youth who are not comfortable completing the Life Map with their mentors wait until they are ready. They do, however, create with their mentors a map of their relationship after 6 and 12 months. These maps may include changes each has faced during the time that they have known each other, how those changes have affected each of them, and ways in which the relationship has developed.

To view some sample maps, click [here](#).