

River Of Life Personal Leadership Activity

Life as a Journey: Discovering Values through Self-Reflection

Purpose: To get clear on one's values or purpose

Activity: Leaders making a difference in the worlds of business and politics consistently take the time to reflect on themselves, their lives, and those core values that make them who they are. One of the most powerful approaches to taking this inward journey is a process called the *River of Life*.

Creating Your River:

- Find a quiet time and space to work where you won't be interrupted for at least 45 minutes. *Tip: Although this can be done with normal paper and pen, we recommend using a large sheet of flipchart paper and some colored markers. You can spread out on the floor, or tape your paper to the wall.*
- Before you begin, take a moment to relax, breathe, and be present. Imagine that you are on retreat, and have all the time in the world.
- Draw a river on the piece of paper winding from the lower left corner to the upper right corner. Label the lower left "Birth" and the upper right "The Present." *Tip: Get creative! Break the rules! When you draw your river, let its shape and features represent what's special about your life. We've seen swamps, bridges, waterfalls, forked rivers, circular rivers, etc. Don't strive for artistic perfection—improvise and surprise yourself.*
- Cast your mind back over your life. Draw islands in the river, each representing places you've lived, key people you've known or who've influenced you, and any other "landmarks" along the river of your life (e.g., key companies, projects, etc.). *Tip: Have fun with this—use different colors, symbols, etc.*
- Along each side of the river, add tributaries representing challenging and affirming moments from your life. Think of those events, decisions, choices, and turning points that taught you something, that made a lasting impact on who you are. *Tip: Draw affirming tributaries in green on the left side of the river, and challenging ones in red on the right side. Write a key word or symbol to remind you what each one represents.*
- Then, go back over your river and add in any important people or experiences that have specifically shaped your perception of leadership. This could be an inspiring mentor or coach, a bad boss who taught you what not to do as a supervisor, or even a particularly powerful TED talk about leadership that stuck with you over time.
- Take a few minutes to look back over your river, adding any missing details. Make sure the river really captures every aspect of your life: family, work, spirituality, other life pursuits.

- *Exploring your river:* Note your insights. In your journal, write about what insights you have while looking back over your river:
 - What patterns or trends do you notice?
 - What experiences and people were especially significant?
 - How do you relate these to how your values have formed over time?
 - How would you relate what you see in your river to the approach you take as a leader?

Bring your River of Life & reflections to the upcoming Leadership Values & Purpose workshop.