
CHAPTER

1

Battle of the Brains

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What if there was a way to do more work with fewer resources and to reduce the number of hours spent working? What if there was a tool that could make you more efficient and more organized? What if there was a technique to enhance your creativity and your ability to communicate ideas? What if you could discover a resource that could change the very foundation of how you think and learn in a way that would enhance your work and life forever? Would you be interested?

Idea mapping has done just that for me and for millions of others around the world. It can offer the same success for you. What follows throughout this book is the process I take groups and individuals through in order to teach them to use their brains more effectively. It begins with where you are today. Here is where it began for me.

The Turning Point

It was late on a Friday afternoon in August of 1996, and I was exhausted from a month of nonstop travel delivering leadership workshops to corporate managers and supervisors of the company for which I was employed. At the time, I was working for EDS—a large, global information technology company. I was one of eight hand-selected leaders asked to join a team that develops and coaches employees throughout the Midwest and Canada in leadership competencies. On Monday the traveling would start all over again in another city. It was going to be my first time teaching a new course; how-

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ever, there was a problem. I wasn't close to being prepared. It was going to be a very long weekend.

Several months earlier I had been certified as a facilitator for Stephen Covey's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders" 5-day workshop. Since receiving the certification, I had not had the opportunity to teach the class. So not only was I unprepared, but so much time had passed in between becoming certified and being invited to speak on the topic that my memories of what I had learned were vague. Familiarizing myself with the material was going to be close to learning it all for the first time. Realistically I needed at least a week to review. If you have ever seen one of these facilitator guides, you can identify with me. It is a three-inch tome of materials (I measured my manual to be sure I wasn't exaggerating!) in addition to many videos. Along with one of my team members, I was scheduled to coteach two of these classes to two different groups in Indianapolis, Indiana, starting on Monday.

The schedule called for us to be there for 2 weeks. On Monday we were teaching the first day of class to Group A. On Tuesday we were teaching the first class to Group B. We were going to repeat that schedule until the classes were completed for both groups. As a seasoned facilitator you can fake a lot of things, but demonstrating an understanding of the material is not one of them. Maybe it was self-preservation or the desire to salvage some of my weekend, but a possible solution came to me.

I had been using and teaching individuals about a unique skill called mind mapping (mind maps® are a registered trademark of the Buzan Organization) for 4 years. (Idea mapping has its original roots in the mind mapping

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technique.) Mind mapping is a way of taking notes and organizing thoughts into key words and pictures and is a technique that can condense mounds of data onto one sheet of paper. It also acts as a memory tool. I knew it was powerful but had never used it for such a large (and critical) application. I was backed into a corner and had no choice. It had to work.

Here was the plan I worked out with my coworker. Since she was much more familiar with the material that we were both invited to present, she would teach day 1 to Group A. I would sit at the back of the room and map the entire day on one 11" × 17" sheet of paper. The following day I would teach day 1 to Group B from my map. If the process worked, we would repeat this strategy for the remainder of our time in Indianapolis. She agreed to give it a try. I enjoyed my weekend for the most part. Although I had sufficient reason to believe the plan would work, I still carried some anxiety with me to Indianapolis.

The Indianapolis experiment, as it came to be known, began on Monday as I sat in the back of the classroom with my markers, with the facilitator guide, participant manual, handouts, and the back-up set of videos surrounding me. I documented everything: sequence, stories, what page participants should turn to, whether I was using a flip chart or an overhead projector, where to cue which video, what to skip, when to eat; you name it—it went on the map. By the end of the day my brain was fried from the intense concentration, but I had done it! The next day, I taught day 1 to an unsuspecting Group B from my single 11" × 17" map.

Complete success! Not only did I have all the material

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in front of me, but I could also see the interconnections between key points. I had internalized the material fairly well, saved at least a week of preparation time, and for future classes only had to review the map before teaching. I was amazed! We executed the plan for the remainder of the workshop with equal success. I still have those original maps, and I would venture to say that I could still teach from them today—even though the last time I taught that class was in 1997.

See Figure 1.1 for the map from that first day in Indianapolis. (See www.IdeaMappingSuccess.com for color versions of this and subsequent idea maps in this book.) I know it looks very strange, but don't worry about that at this point. You're not supposed to be able to understand my map. I just want you to begin to see how these graphical creatures are structured.

That experience personalized the magnitude of the power of mapping in a way I had not yet experienced. Since then my efficiency, productivity, and creativity have continued to soar as a result of using this new skill. Now I have a reservoir of equally powerful success stories from people all around the globe. I'll share some of those throughout this book.

Objectives

This book was written with the following objectives in mind:

- To give you a tool that will help you be exponentially more productive and efficient in work and life

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- To spark creative thinking
- To enable you to access the infinite expanse of your brain
- To offer an alternative to traditional thinking, communicating, creating, and learning
- To teach you the skill of idea mapping

Today's Demands On You

What business and life demands are you currently facing? In how many different directions are you being pulled? Are you constantly being asked to solve problems, be creative, plan, manage projects, save time, present ideas, keep excellent client relationships, stay on top of new information, eliminate redundancy, lead your team effectively, reduce costs, and balance that with everything else you have going on personally?

In today's busy world people are constantly being asked to do more with less. The results? People are overwhelmed. They spend huge numbers of hours at work (sometimes spinning their wheels); the job becomes this miserable albatross around one's neck; the workload only gets heavier; the boss's expectations get greater; and employees, families, and businesses all suffer. Is that how we want to live? I don't think so.

So you've turned to this book for a tool that will help you. Good choice. But here's where I want to provide a small caution. If you're like most people you have been thinking, organizing, taking notes, making decisions, planning, communicating, presenting, studying, and creating in a linear

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fashion since you were in elementary school. It is a deep-seated habit. You have built a strong neural pathway in your brain. It's going to take some patience, practice, and persistence to learn a new skill equally as powerful as the existing one. Idea mapping itself is not difficult to learn—in fact, it's quite simple. It's the competing tendency to return to the habit of linear notes that will take a little effort to overcome initially. For a short time it will feel easier to take notes in a linear format, but once you are through the learning curve, you will amaze yourself. Linear thinking and note taking are *normal*—but they aren't *natural*. An idea map is a *natural* reflection of how your brain was designed to work. Learning idea mapping is the first step in improving productivity, increasing creativity, and becoming more focused and organized overall. I congratulate you on your willingness to risk being different and to stray from the norm! It will be one of the best investments of time and energy you will ever make.

A Look At Your Own Notes

To understanding how idea mapping can benefit you, you must first understand how you currently externalize your thoughts onto paper. Please locate some notes you have recently taken. Preferably they are several pages in length, important, and more than 24 hours old. They can be notes you've created by hand or on the computer and for any purpose. From this point forward, I will refer to these notes as your “baseline notes.”

Ask yourself the following questions:

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- How well do you remember the information represented by your notes?
- How well were the thoughts organized?
- Did you use multiple colors?
- Did you include any images?
- What was your purpose for taking the notes? Did they meet your objective?
- Did you have too little or too much detail for your purpose?
- How would you rate your creativity and imagination in these pages?
- What did you do as a result of taking these notes?

This examination will give you a baseline of comparisons as you start to idea map.

Purpose of Taking Notes

The main factor I want to bring to your attention at this early stage is the importance of determining and adhering to the purpose of the notes you are taking. Often times I find people taking unnecessarily detailed notes as if they were going to be tested on the material. This habit comes from those many years of schooling. One of the best pieces of advice I can give when you are capturing your thoughts (electronically or on paper) is to define your purpose before you begin your notes. It will shape everything you do—what kind of data is captured, the amount of detail you attend to, how much time you devote to the process, the volume of material

you listen to or research, how you organize your thoughts, how you determine whether it is a draft or a final product, and what the final use is for this document (or idea map!) when it is complete.

This is so important that I'm going to call it *Lesson One* in a series of lessons that will be covered in this book. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of Lessons.)

Lesson One— Define your purpose for taking notes.

Hang on to your baseline notes. We will use them in an activity later in this book.

Benefits of Idea Mapping

Training your brain to learn more effectively will have an enormous impact on your overall efficiency. For a *trained brain*, learning requires less brain activity, while the performance outcome increases multiple times over. An *untrained brain* is a model of confusion. When asked to perform an unfamiliar task, an untrained brain will search for a solution by going to multiple parts of the brain seeking answers (and often not finding them) and is therefore inefficient. (For actual brain scans and research done at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, see Chapter 9, titled “An Amazing Discovery,” from *Memory Power* by Scott Hagwood.)

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Ultimately idea maps can provide benefits in the following areas:

- Learning
- Creativity
- Thinking
- Planning
- Organizing
- Motivation
- FUN!!!
- Memory
- Note taking
- Decision making
- Communication
- Presentations
- Studying
- “Big Picture” view of ideas and the interrelationship between those thoughts
- Job performance
- And more!

Your job at this point is to commit to allowing me to take you through the process of learning to create idea maps. Be ready to do a bit of work. Once you’ve learned this new skill, I’m going to ask you to do one map each day until it feels natural for you. It will be a journey with many rewards. Ready to begin?

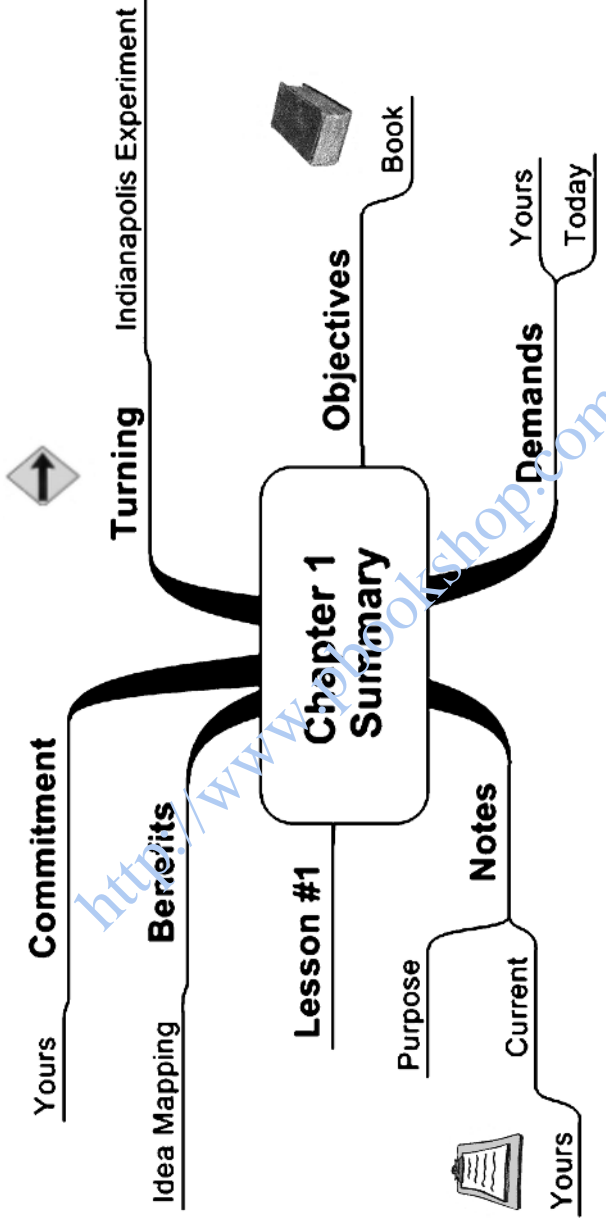


Figure 1.2 Chapter 1 Summary

Summary

There will be an idea-map summary at the end of each chapter (see Figure 1.2). I know you haven't been introduced to idea mapping yet, so let me give a brief description of Figure 1.2. At the center of this diagram is my topic—Chapter 1. The seven surrounding branches are the main ideas (for me) from the first chapter. Any additional words further define the main ideas (again for me only), and images enhance the words. You'll learn much more about this in following chapters. Use it as a review or add to it in any way that is helpful. Mostly, just be curious about it at this point and look forward to your upcoming learning.

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