

### **CT3 Paper 17: Creating a timeline**

A timeline or lifeline exercise is a grid that allows you to have a bird's eye view of your life, and to see the positive and negative shifts along the way on a single trajectory.

Even more, it can be a tool to make conscious self-directed changes that, literally, rewire your brain to heal itself. Known as plasticity, your brain has an innate capacity to make changes in positive, healing directions. Like other tools, you need to know it's there to access, and how to use it.

Everyone has a unique timeline. It consists of a series of events, trends and turns that culminate in producing cycles of positive and negative shifts, highs and lows in the course of a lifetime from birth.

#### **What are the benefits?**

Putting your timeline on paper is an opportunity to record vital information about your life and past. There are several benefits to completing this exercise. It helps you:

- See the themes that connect and cut across seemingly different events.
- Recognise key achievements, growth opportunities, lessons, persons, new wisdom, and so on.
- Realise the value of negative shifts as opportunities toward positive shifts.
- Increase a sense of purpose by connecting life events in new ways.
- Find new meanings between your life at present in relation to your past and future.
- Understand how your experiences better prepared you to face future challenges.
- Note how your responses to events have shaped your life and character (and not events themselves).

Potentially all of the above hint at an even more important benefit. Your timeline can be a way to uncover and potentially 'rework' your life's story.

Your story tells you who you are, what you believe, and how to best fulfil your emotional needs to matter and meaningfully connect with others and life around you. Everyone has a story, or stories, because humans are story tellers by nature.

Your story is powerful because your sense of self-worth lives in your storyline. Your thoughts and beliefs are powerful energies that can, and do, shape your emotional responses to past events in your life, and thus have fashioned your story. Based on your conclusions about yourself and others around you, the interpretations of your past that you continue to hold in mind, wittingly or unwittingly, operate as perception filters that continue to powerfully impact your life today. When left to the part of the mind that operates processes you do not have to think about - the subconscious mind - toxic thinking and limiting beliefs can unnecessarily activate your defense strategies, or early survival-love scripts, which can jam or have a paralysing effect on the otherwise amazing abilities of your brain for reflective thought.

Many have a great story in certain areas of their lives in which they enjoy some measure of success and happiness, for example, but not in others. The bottom line is that, unless you learn to let go, for example, of your need for others' approval to feel worthwhile, you will have difficulties in effectively processing emotions of fear and anger in ways that allow your brain to engage certain natural integrative processes that your brain is willing and able to accomplish.

When you let of giving others power to define you, you create internal shifts, that allow you to take ownership of your story, and embrace new possibilities, i.e., to experience greater acceptance of your intrinsic value and worth. This shift in your experience of yourself activates dynamic processes of neural integration in your brain and body, such as growth of new neurons and changes or expansion of existing connections between neurons.

**Getting started:**

The first phase consists of five preparatory steps to complete before putting your timeline down on paper.

1. Have to hand the following materials: markers, pen or pencil, notepad.
2. Thoughtfully reflect on the course of your life, its high and low points, as well as stable times.
3. During this time of reflection, list life events on a notepad, keeping the below guidelines in mind:
  - Include experiences that influenced your life and later successes, both positive and negative.
  - More or less, there should be a significant life event at least every other year or so. Thus, if you are 40 years old, you'll have between 15 to 20 life shaping shifts.
  - Be sure to include negative events or turns, keeping in mind that they can be as essential, if not more so, than positive ones. A good story is multidimensional, and conflicts are key to telling a great story.
4. Put the events in chronological order of your (approximate) age at the time.
5. Place a "+" sign in front of events that are overall positive, and a "-" sign in front of ones that were overall negative – and then rate the positive or negative intensity of each event on a scale of 1 to 10, low to high.

**Examples might include:**

The birth of a family member	+ 7
First day at school	+ 10
The beginning of a romantic relationship	+ 10
The end of a romantic relationship	- 3
Experience of bullying at school	- 9
Graduation from high school or university	- 5
Your first job	+ 6
A move to a new location	- 4
An illness or injury	- 6
An award or achievement	+ 8
The death of a family member or friend	- 10