

Mapping the World of Work

Tony Buzan talks to Christine Miller

You've probably seen or heard of Mind Maps® and their world-famous creator, Tony Buzan. You may already use Mind Maps as a tool for a specific task like taking notes, planning presentations or revising for exams, and you may have noticed just how powerful and effective they are. But have you ever thought about using Mind Maps to manage your working life - for boosting creativity, for problem-solving, for planning meetings, for negotiating tricky contracts - or even to enhance your relationships? Tony Buzan agreed to talk to "ReSource" about his latest book "Mind Maps at Work", due to be published later this summer. A man with a true mission, he has a vision, and a definite purpose – he wants the world to benefit from the power of Mind Maps to free workers in any field from the drudgery and overload of their working lives. As he says,

"Mind Maps® can help you think creatively about anything, and thinking creatively is the way to achieve what you want."

"Mind Maps at Work", Tony Buzan's forthcoming book, arrived during the busy and demanding period leading up to the publication of this first edition of ReSource Magazine. We'd used Mind Maps® to plan the project. I'd used them previously to plan books, trainings and presentations, and so I knew just how effective they are. I was enthusiastic and thrilled to be in possession of this manuscript; it was something I'd requested - and yet I still had a sense of overwhelm,



of "how will I fit this in", when I first sat down to review the pages in preparation for our interview. I was immediately captivated by the subtitle - *"how to be the best at your job and still have time to play"*. As I read on, I began to feel excited and energised, and with the dawning realisation that I had temporarily forgotten to use Mind Maps® to continue with my planning, I began to feel free and creative, yet supremely in control. Ideas started to fire off in my head, and as I opened up to the possibilities, it was as if my brain unleashed much more of its full creative force. Then I reached the section on planning. Ah, yes, planning.... So I stopped reading the manuscript, mind-mapped the contents of ReSource, and promptly regained my sense of clarity. You can see the results on page 4 of the magazine, as a perfect example of a Mind Map working, and at work, just as the book's title suggests, and described succinctly in 'Mind Maps at Work', on page 34:

"The Mind Map gives you control over all the information relating to the problem, in a secure and stable framework, showing you the "big picture" as well as the details, so allowing you to address the problem in a comprehensive and integrated way."

I then returned calmly to my reading, and whizzed through the book. (You'll no doubt have guessed by now that my notes were in the form of a Mind Map!) First of all, I want to say that the book is truly excellent. It is extremely

well written, “dedicated to everyone in the world’s workplaces, whether you area Chief Executive in China, an accountant in the UK or a nanny in Norway”, and filled with inspiring stories of Mind Maps at Work, drawn from the tens of thousands of examples which have been sent spontaneously to Mr Buzan by delighted users.

Comprehensive in its scope, it covers a multitude of possible applications, some quite unexpected in their scale. For example, I was fascinated to discover that Mind Maps were used for planning the restoration of power to residents in Manhattan after 9/11 and the collapse of the World Trade Center:

“Con Edison, the supplier of gas and electricity to the residents of New York...had experience with one crucial tool – Mind Maps. Con Edison hosted teams from all regions of public utility to develop a complex action plan to route their way through the crisis. A mega-Mind Map was drawn up, on which all problems and necessary solutions were laid out. Each step was prioritised and sequenced, and the impact of the failure of one utility on another

examined, and this formed the basis of an operations guide.....The coming together of the resources, ideas and know-how of the utilities through the medium of Mind Maps, minimised the distress.” (page 35)

At the other end of the spectrum, and of equal importance, Mind Maps are a great tool for balancing family life with work, as Rosalind Gower, a working mother and television producer with the BBC says:

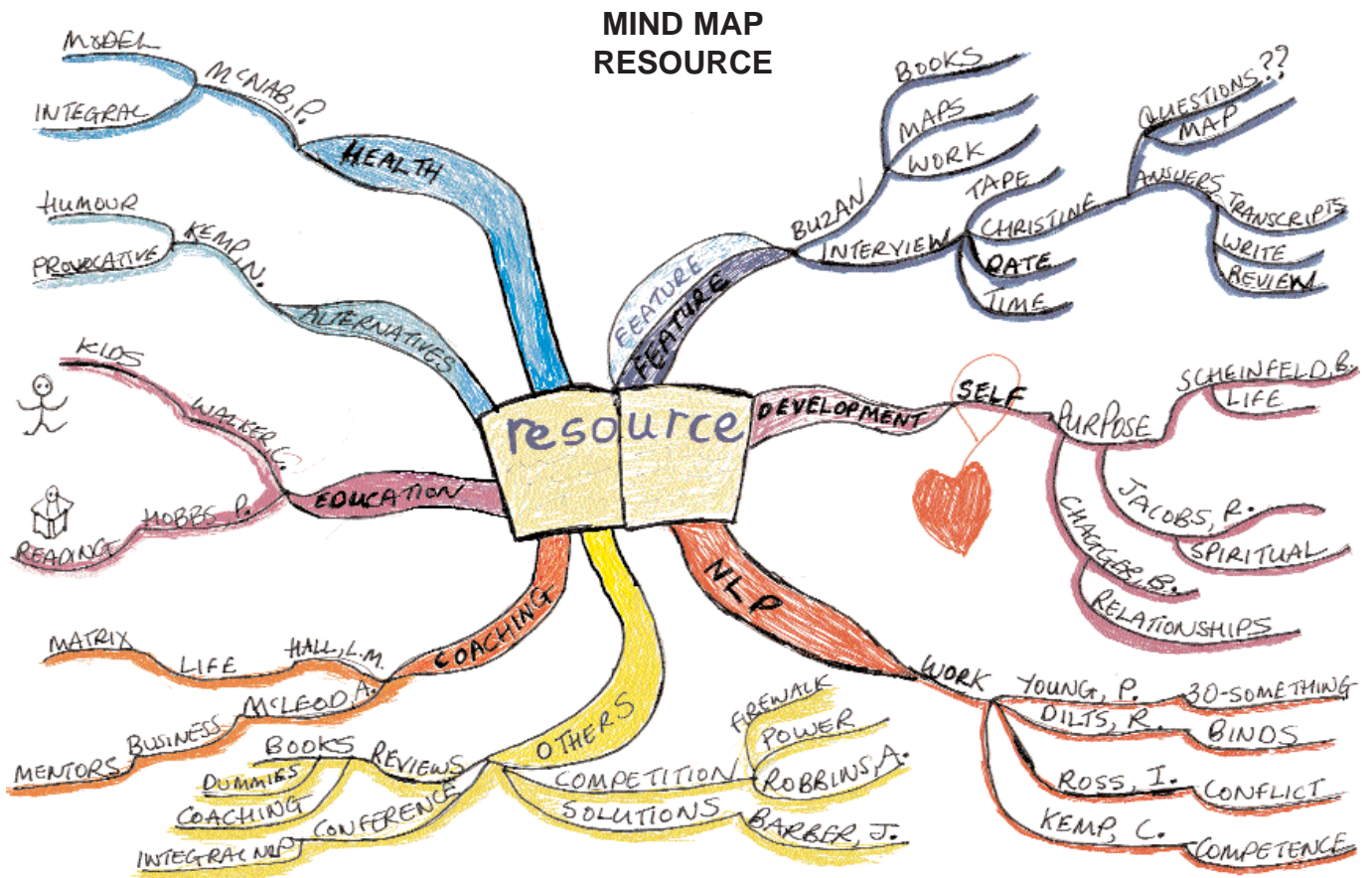
“Mind Maps have changed my whole life. As a working mother you are always being torn in loads of different directions, so if I set up a home Mind Map with ‘work’ branches and ‘kids’ branches and all the other responsibilities that working mothers have, I don’t forget anything.”(page 222)

These are just two of many case studies which illustrate the uses of Mind Maps at Work, and realising that they can be applied to virtually any job in a multiplicity of situations is a significant breakthrough. The issue of work/life balance is critical in our society, and any means of reducing stress

and increasing fulfillment deserves investigation and careful consideration, especially if productivity is improved as a consequence. Given the rapid rate of change today, all companies know they need to be creative and responsive to stay ahead and compete effectively. As an employer, just imagine the power of releasing the imaginative powers of your workforce, and freeing people’s energy to be innovative and solution focussed, whilst they enjoy the benefits of a balanced life! As a worker of any kind – what will it mean to you when you unleash your potential? Tony Buzan says:

“Any successful business person will tell you, creativity and the ability to come up with new ideas are paramount to personal and organisational success, and every self-aware business is seeking people who can contribute in this way.” (page 9)

Mind Maps aren’t new – they have been around for over 30 years, with Tony’s first book “Use Your Head” published in Spring 1974 by BBC Books, and the BBC TV programme of the same name airing at around the



same time. I was curious about the continuing passion which drives Tony Buzan to keep developing his work. Here's what he told me:

TB: "The passion comes from my own failures as a young professional, and my inability to think, my inability to remember, to

read, getting swamped with work, getting nervous when I had exams because I knew I wasn't going to be able to perform to my ability. This was later supplemented after I had invented Mind Maps as my life raft by the fact that when I began to teach Mind Mapping in schools

and businesses, I realised that it wasn't only the memory tool that I thought it was going to be - it was a universal thinking tool. I watched children go from failures to successes, I saw business people able to organise, able to manage, able to solve problems, able to create, able to remember study and learn. And the main thought that sprung to my mind at that time was this: mentally the world is filled with starving people, and that starvation is equal to physical starvation.

You can't really walk by somebody starving on the street and not do something to help them, without lessening yourself, without lessening society, without lessening the human race. It is the same with our brains and mental starvation; so as long as there are people who have not been taught to learn how to learn, who have not been given the operations manuals for their brains, then I am driven to provide the food and sustenance and help that I can, to make sure that everyone is fed."

CM: *How did you discover what was important to you, that this is your life's work?*

TB: "It's a nice story actually. I was in school doing reasonably well, but increasingly under duress, because my

note-taking methods didn't work, and the more notes I took the worse I got. But I didn't realise that for a few years. Then at university I began to coach people who were having major learning problems, and that was both university students and people in general. I then

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began to travel around the world, with my goal being to be either a lawyer or an animal psychologist, and tried different lines of work. I tried working in management training schemes, I worked on farms as a labourer, on building sites as a labourer, I did supply teaching, I worked as an editor, I was working in all these areas while at the same time I was developing the theory of Mind Maps for studying Memory, Creativity and Learning. As a hobby I was coaching; as a hobby I was sometimes going on special assignments for the Inner London Education Authority; and as a hobby I was reading books about memory. I realised in about 1970 that my hobby, which was basically exploring the functions and limits of the brain and helping kids and people in trouble to get out of trouble, was taking up about 10 hours a day while my professions were taking about 6 hours a day! I realised that what gave me the greatest pleasure in life was my hobby. From that moment on, my hobby became my life quest."

CM: *And who and what have been the main influences in your life?*

TB: "Leonardo da Vinci was a major influence, as the manifestation of a

human brain that got its "operations manual" right and demonstrated it in art and science, as well as the blending of what we now know to be the left and right hemispheres. His note-taking was an inspiration to me. He took notes that were proto-Mind Maps. He was one of the geniuses

whose note-taking styles I studied: Einstein, Newton, Queen Elizabeth I, Marie Curie, Maria Montessori, Picasso, Stravinsky, who all made notes using images and lines and words. Lorraine Gill, the artist, was a major influence in that she convinced me that not only could

I draw, which I thought I couldn't, but that everybody could. Vanda North, who as President of the International Society for Accelerated Learning and Teaching had been applying my work to education and business with extraordinary results, showed me what could happen with Mind Maps one generation removed.

The other BIG inspiration is the light in people's eyes when they suddenly realise what their brains are capable of, and when you can't wrench them away from their Mind Map. The other inspirations that keep me leaping out of bed in the mornings are the tens of thousands of success stories of people that use them. Amusingly - the only thing that annoys me about Mind Maps is that I had to invent them! I look back to my early life and imagine somewhat wistfully what would have happened if I had known about them before. ...my mind would have been freed from the linear shackles 20 years earlier than it was. I would have been freer than I was for 20 more years."

CM: *What inspired you to write Mind Maps at Work?*

TB: People would come to me and say "How do you use Mind Maps to help you bring up a baby?" Or, to give a presentation, at work, to run my local

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practice, in my study skills, and I realised that Mind Maps have tens of thousands of uses. There are so many applications, the sheer range of choices can at first be confusing – and can actually obscure what a Mind Map can do. Having seen how people were instantly ignited by having specific instructions for how to do it in a specific situation, I was suddenly being asked how do you apply them to work, how do Mind Maps work at work? That’s what inspired Mind Maps at Work.”

CM: *How is Mind Maps at Work different from your previous works?*

TB: “It is very specifically different. It is taking a multiplicity of situations and talking about Mind Maps in a formal work situation. It’s also talking about work whether work is: doctor; housemother or father; manager; computer programmer; marketer; secretary or teacher. It looks at the range of situations you’re in at work and the different range of functions you perform at work – such as how to manage, how to problem solve, how to create, how to plan, how to monitor, how to do projects, teamwork, managing knowledge, managing change, managing self, man-

aging others, how to get better quality and time management.

People often say things like ‘Ah! I didn’t realise. I was amazed when a colleague of mine said I could use Mind Maps for solving problems because I’d always used them for planning my day.’ There’s an explosion of realisation that there is an explosion of uses. People are inflamed with awareness when they realise that a tool which has been of use to them in one way suddenly has a multiplicity of applications, and therefore the horizons they had been looking at recede to infinity.”

CM: *I hope you’ll be pleased to know what you just said – we did. We mind-mapped the magazine, and I’d been using them for planning and note-taking. Reading the book made me realise that I haven’t yet used Mind Maps to their full potential, and it’s something I’ll definitely be exploring, it really did set me on fire. I’m now particularly interested in using Mind Maps for balance in life.*

TB: “That’s how I use them. The branches of a Mind Map stabilise your activities through the year. When you’ve got that Mind Map of your plan and vision for the coming year, it stabilises your mind, reduces stress and gives you direction. It therefore makes you a lot more confident and a lot more successful.”

CM: *What’s the response you’d most like from your readers as a result of reading your book?*

TB: “I want that light in their eyes and minds to be ignited. I want them to realise there is hope, that there is a way out of the drudgery or overload or confusion or lack of vision of their working life – that there is a single tool that they can apply in multiple directions -

that they’ve got the ‘Swiss army knife’ for the brain and that’s the Mind Map.”

CM: *What will ‘Mind Maps at Work’ do for them?*

TB: “Teach them how to use their mental resources in a far more effective and productive way and in so doing it will give them a lot more freedom to do other things with their lives. Mind Maps are **Freedom Fighters**.”

CM: *And what are the five main tips you’d give them to achieve this?*

- TB: “I’d give just two:
1. Read the book.
2. Put it into practice.
It doesn’t need five.”

CM: *That’s a great asset, then, to be able to cut to the bare bones. And what’s the main message, the key point you’d like to offer your readers?*

TB: “**The main message is – your brain is a sleeping giant and Mind Maps are the prince or princess’s kiss that awakens it!**”

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Mind Maps at Work

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Christine Miller has a first degree in Linguistics and is an author, trainer and NLP Master Practitioner, with an MA in Counselling Practice. She works as a corporate consultant and in private practice with a varied clientele from school age children to adults. She is the author of a forthcoming book called “Resourceful Intelligence”, to be published by Crown House. She has a background in research, marketing and training, having held senior management posts with UK public companies, where she discovered that her skills and passion lay in helping people uncover their potential to perform at their best, to experience true “resourceful intelligence”. A firm believer in brain-friendly learning, Christine also offers seminars and workshops in personal and business growth and development, and trainings for other professionals in the techniques she has developed.

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