

Charting your future

Illustrations by Laura Cedar
Photographs by JP Masclet

We've all had times when we'd like to move forward, but don't know where to start. Catherine Jones discovers how mind maps can help you find your direction

You've just sat down to breakfast on Monday, 1 January 2007. With a fresh new year stretching out before you, the morning's thoughts could take a turn more profound than usual. What do you really want to achieve in 2007?

Perhaps the prospect of a fresh year has left you feeling buoyant, full of plans and goals for the next 12 months. How will you channel this positive rush, collect your thoughts and assess what's needed to make them all happen? Alternatively, what if you feel at a

loss, wondering how you can make this year any different from the last? Rather than organising your goals, you wish you could work out what those goals are.

While there are many tools and courses that can help you uncover and achieve your goals, perhaps one of the simplest is mind mapping. Used well, it can help you take control of your life, clarify your goals and plan key decisions. Devised by psychologist Tony Buzan, author of *Use Your Head* (£27.99, BBC Active), these colourful diagrams comprise key words and images emanating from a central idea, and are an effective way



'It's like brainstorming with yourself'

LORRAINE BEAVIS, 38, from Bramley, is married and has a daughter, seven, and a son, two. She works part-time in her family's restaurant.

MY LIFE WAS incomplete, but I didn't know what was missing. This was early last year and I was at home alone with my children, and doing everything myself because my husband was away a lot. It was a bad point in our 10-year marriage, we weren't communicating and I was getting more miserable.

I was desperate to find a solution, and then a friend introduced me to mind maps. It was inspirational; it's like having a brainstorm with yourself. The

words and pictures triggered other thoughts in my head, and I found myself going places that my brain didn't expect. The map was my life plan, so my central image was me. It had three main branches: what I wanted to be, have and do. The hardest part was working out what I wanted to do, but, as I worked on the map, the issues of independence and identity came up – something I hadn't even thought about before. I started this journey thinking about all the ways I needed to be better to other people, but I realised I needed to focus on myself. To my surprise, it revealed that what I needed and wanted was to set up my own business.

The mind map has made me more determined to focus on what's important to me. Now I'm setting up my own business, I feel determined and enthusiastic, which rubs off in other areas of my life. My husband and I are communicating a lot better. It's not that everything in your life gets better the moment you do a mind map, but the process of writing and drawing is crucial. Talking it over with others is easy, but you have to be more honest when you write it down and it gives you clarity. The mind map helped me pinpoint what needed changing. And the fact that I can refer back to it is very motivating.



