

Creating Life Style Representations

One hears a lot of talk about life style these days. People talk of liking or disliking their current life styles, of the merits of various alternative life styles, of how Mary and Tim Jones have changed their life style.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *life style* as “an internally consistent way of life or style of living that reflects the attitudes and values of an individual or a culture.” That is, life style is someone’s way of life. It is the pattern of how one relates to key parts of external reality; how one uses time; whom one relates to, and how; how one uses or relates to objects and possessions; how one reacts to geography and space generally; what one does. Second, one’s life style, insofar as there is choice in its establishment, reflects some of the things inside oneself. It is, in a sense, a mapping out of who one is into what one does, how one does it, and with whom or what.

Life style relates to our present purposes in two ways. First, career- and job-related decisions are a subset of the total life decisions that people make, whether consciously or not. It would certainly make things easier if we could treat job and career decisions independently from other life style decisions, but we really can’t—they are interdependent. If one chooses to live in a cabin in Maine, that choice makes the possibility of working as a loan officer in a bank in Los Angeles impractical. If one chooses to work for a consulting firm in a job that takes sixty hours a week, one third of it out of town, one probably cannot spend seven hours a day, every day, with one’s spouse and children. If one chooses to be sur-

rounded by expensive art and yet has no independent source of funds, it is probably impractical to seek a job as the executive director of the local community chest.

Second, one’s past and current life styles, in that they reflect attitudes and values, can provide us with data. No matter how constrained one is by economics or institutional requirements, one always has some choice about how to adapt to those constraints. And the form or pattern of adaptation says something about the person.

Assignment

The assignment is to produce on paper a representation, nonnarrative in nature, that will reflect your life style as accurately as you can and provide you with data useful for analysis. Your life style representation should include a consideration of your past life style, your current life style, and your desired future life style.

There are a number of alternative ways you might approach this assignment.

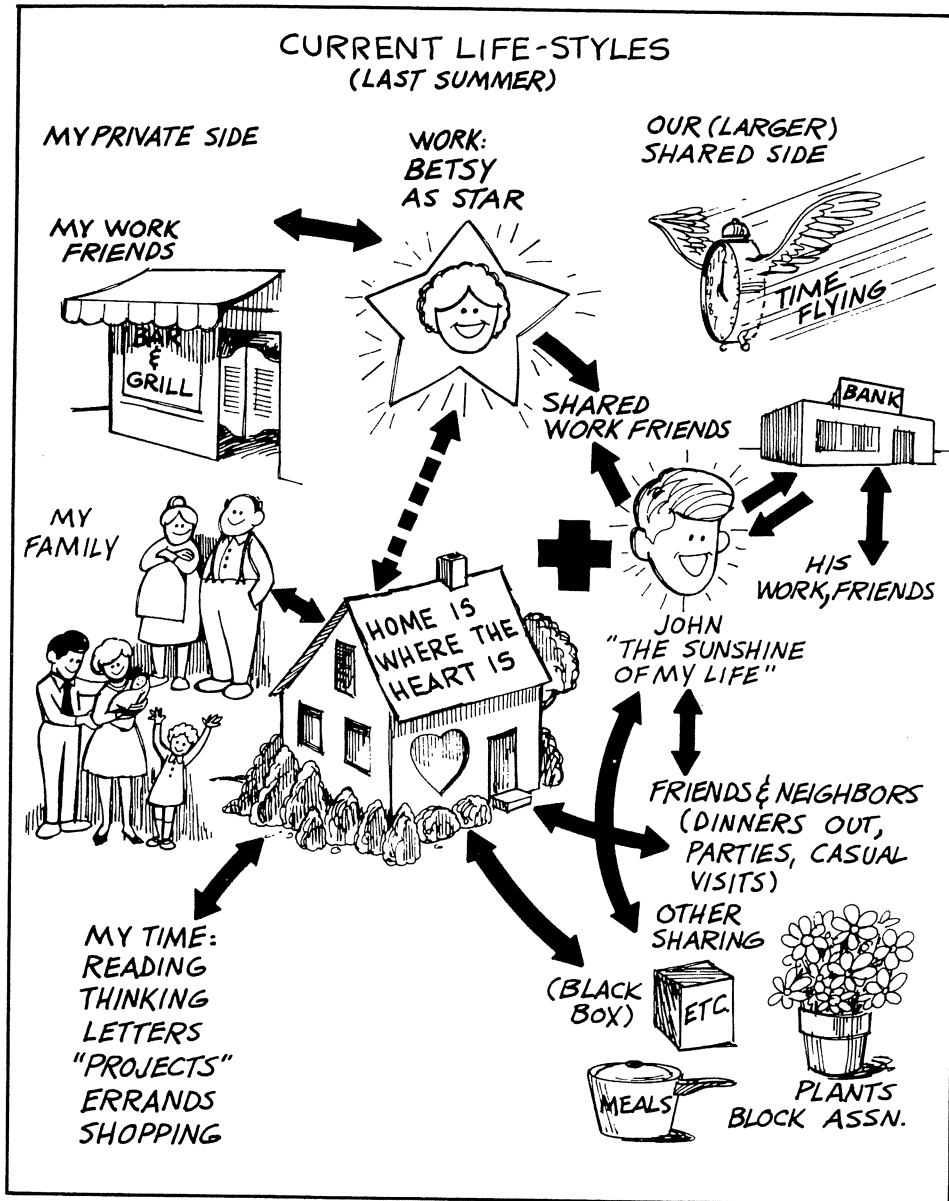
Open-Ended Option

This first option is open-ended. You may let your creative side run free in selecting your approach to the assignment. You may choose without restraint the shape or the form of your representation. If you choose this option, feel free to use any media, any

Exhibit 12-1

An Open-Ended Life Style Diagram

(Betsy Drake)



Current.

I used last summer just because it is a little more compact, a little less geographically and emotionally fragmented than my life here at school. The fundamentals are the same, and have been for as long as I've been making my own life: a place of my own, suited to my taste; John and our shared time/place/experiences/feelings/intellects; time of my own; lots of reading; work which is satisfying and visible.

In the Next Few Years.

Lots of the same elements. The only significant difference is right now a big question mark: kid or kids? If so, will I feel that I can still work?

material, and any approach that you feel captures more, rather than less, of the complexity of the detail and shape of your life style. The only constraint should be that your work can be viewed while sitting at a desk. Exhibit 12-1 is one example of a free-style life style diagram.

Time-Oriented Representations

Time-oriented life style representations begin with a consideration of the finite amount of time an individual has and attempt to reflect the personal allocations of that time. Exhibit 12-2 is an example done by a student who chose a bar graph structure. Pie charts or other graphic means are also appropriate. Exhibit 12-3 shows a life style diagram that reflects major interests and activities chronologically.

Relationships-Orientation Option

Another way to approach representing your life style is to begin with your relationships. Photograph collages; network diagrams with degrees of strength, intimacy, frequency of interaction, and other related

variables indicated; or cluster diagrams are appropriate ways of using this option. You may be able to think of others.

Activities

Another way to approach this assignment is to think of the things you do and to represent those activities in ways that reflect who you are.

Aspects

Another approach is to begin with the list of aspects of our lives shown in Exhibit 12-4. This list is similar to the one we used in the Values Sort. For each aspect, write down your interests, goals, characteristics, and needs. Then use that list to devise a graphic representation of the life style (yours) that incorporates all the items on the list.

Things to Remember

Whichever option you choose, there some things you should keep in mind. Your representation should reflect the past, the present, and the future. It should

Exhibit 12-2
A Time Allocation Life Style Representation

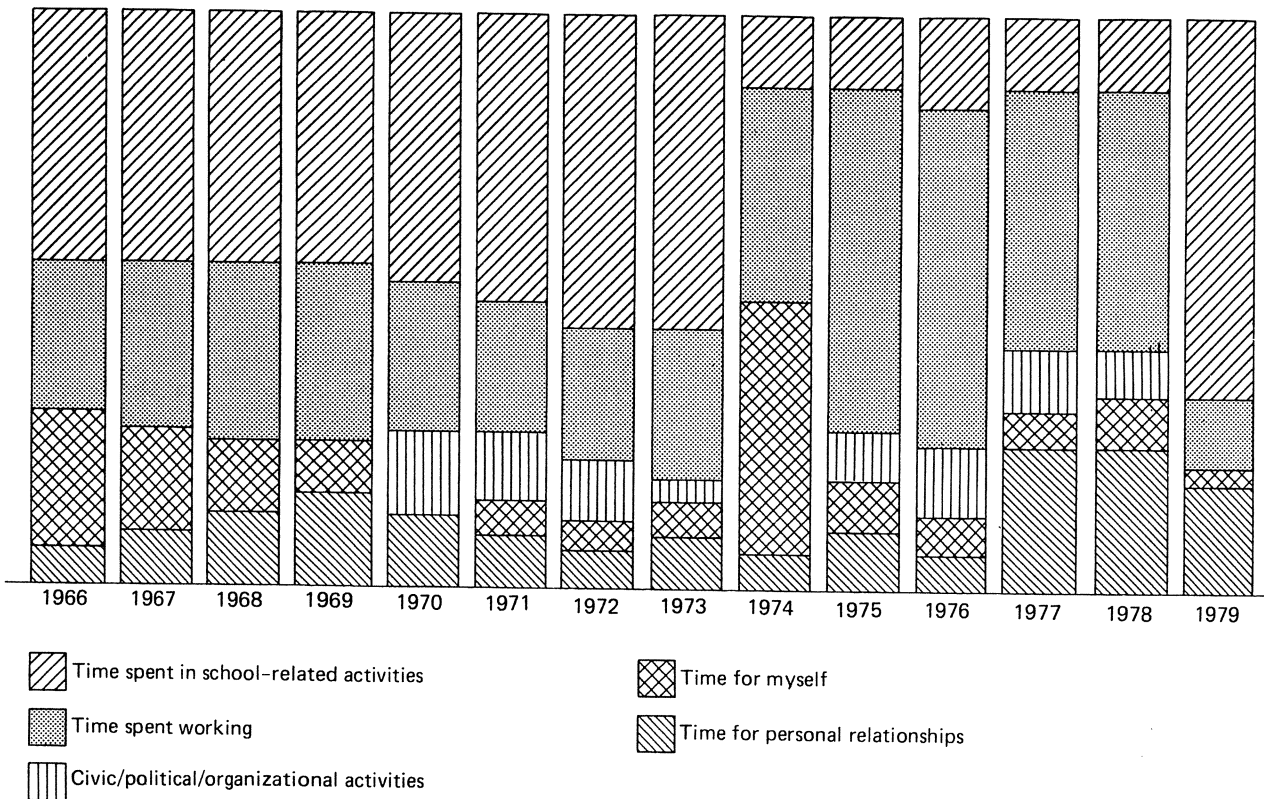


Exhibit 12-4

Aspects of a Person's Life

Physical
Material (possessions)
Financial
Emotional
Spiritual
Professional
Educational
Intellectual
Social
Marital
Parental
Familial
Societal
Political
Cultural

have some means of indicating the strength or the importance of a particular object or activity or per-

son in your life style. It should reflect as accurately as possible the level of congestion or complexity you experience in your life. Last, it should feel comfortable to you when you have finished it. In other words, when you look at your life style representation, your diagram or representation should communicate a sense of who you are in such a way that you feel comfortable with it, that it seems to be "you," and that it reflects the major issues and aspects of your life.

Finally, remember that this is *your* exercise. Be as creative as you like. If you do not feel creative or artistic, relax. We are not expecting a work of art; what we want is a representation that says something about who you were, are, and will be.

When you have completed the Life Style Representation, make an entry in your Feelings Record. What was your reaction to the assignment? Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? What were you thinking about as you made your representation?

Feelings Record: Life Style Diagram

Exercise

Analyzing Life Style Representations

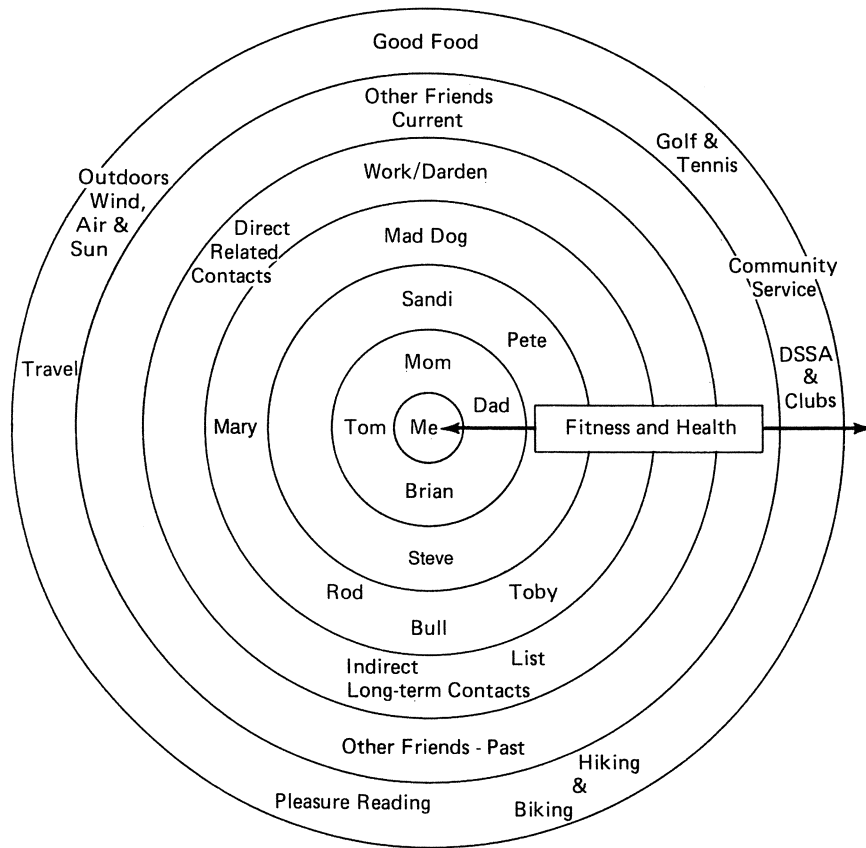
You can interpret these data by looking for patterns or relationships between parts of your lives that will provide insight into who you are and what is important to you. Look at the following two cases.

Note:

1. The relationships between things that appear in the diagram
2. The strength of those relationships
3. The sources of satisfaction and enjoyment in the diagram
4. The sources of anxiety and frustration
5. The number of people and how they fit into the diagram

Begin to draw inferences from these observations. Note the specific data that you are looking at as you write down each inference. Again, begin by asking yourself to complete the phrase, "This is a person who. . . ." When you have finished analyzing Steven Taylor's and Carrie Baugh's diagrams, go on to your own.

Steven Taylor's Life Style Diagram

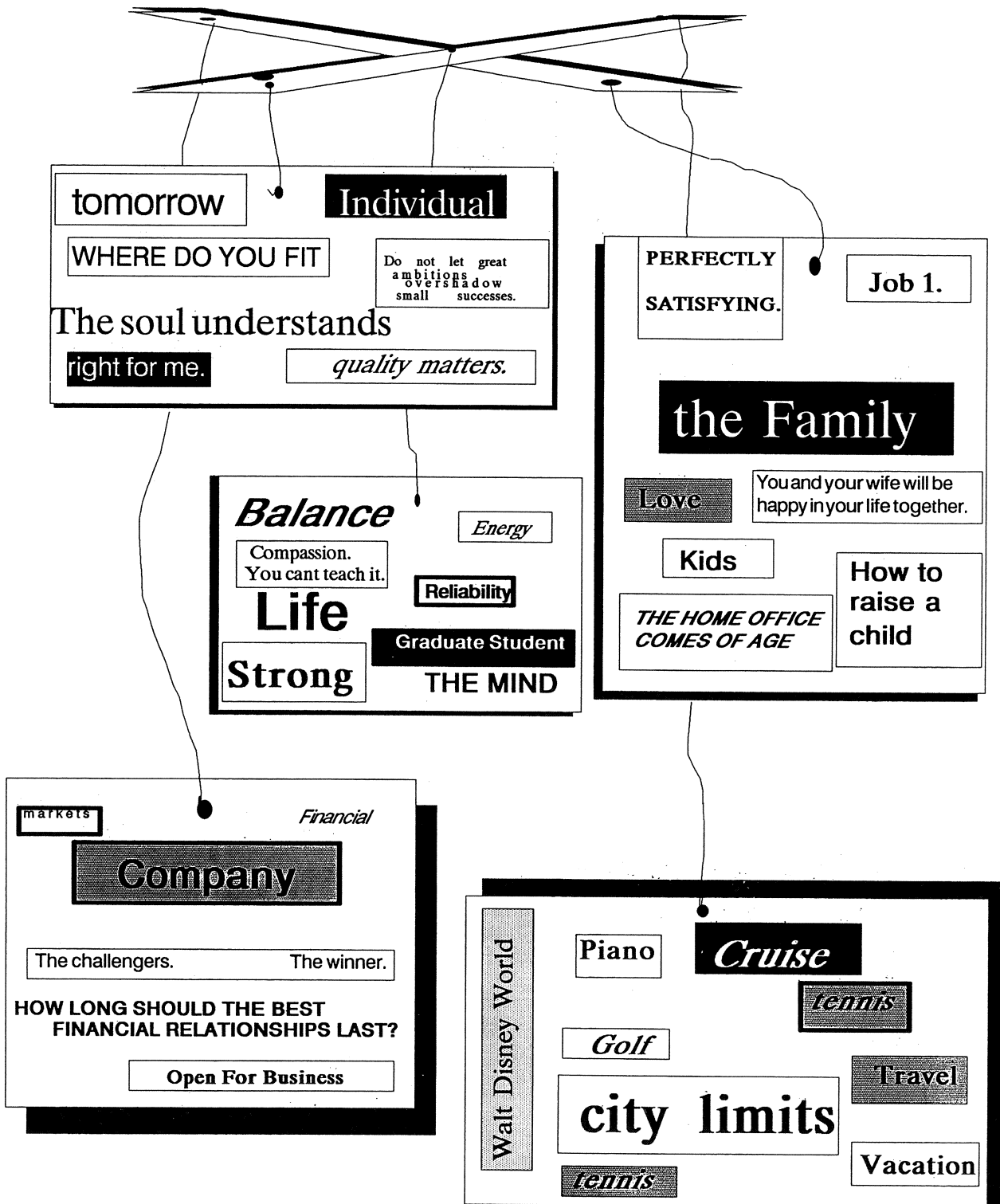


Prepared by Lori Wilson and James G. Clawson. Copyright © 1989 by the Darden Graduate Business School Foundation, Charlottesville, VA.

Carrie Baugh's Life Style Diagram

Carrie chose to create a three-dimensional life style diagram. Her diagram takes the form of a mobile.

Five cards contain phrases cut out from magazines which pertain to Carrie's life. Each card has a central theme: Balance, Family, Company, Individual, and Leisure. Here is a replica of Carrie's mobile.
UVA-PACS-064



Prepared by Lori Wilson and Jim Clawson. Copyright © 1990 by the Darden Graduate Business School Foundation, Charlottesville, VA.

NOTES:

1. Areas identified: Family, Individual, Leisure, Work, Life/Balance.
2. Family is job 1.
3. Leisure includes golf, tennis, piano, and travel.
4. Family shows home office.
5. Individual shows tomorrow, quality, personal goals.
6. Company shows challenges, winners.
7. Central area is Life: compassion, strength, energy, reliability.
8. Family, Individual Development, Leisure, and Professional surround Life/Balance.
9. Created a mobile instead of drawing.

INFERENCES:

Carrie is a person who:

1. Wants to balance life style between family, career, identity, and leisure.
2. Likes athletics.
3. Enjoys the piano.
4. Considers family first priority.
5. Wants a challenging career.
6. Perhaps wants to work out of her home.
7. Values individual characteristics.
8. Seeks variety.
9. Views life as a struggle to balance different goals at different life stages.