

Mid-Life Crisis Explained

In Seth's latest book, *Linchpin*, he spends a lot of time talking about maps and artists. That being an artist means you create your own map, your own path. And, that society is changing. Rather than spending your life following a map someone else created, to be successful you'll need to create your *own* map moving forward.



While I've not been an assembly line worker in a literal sense, it took me awhile (couple dozen reiterations) for what Seth was talking about to truly sink in...appreciating how much of it related to my own life.

Life was relatively easy, for a long time. With a clear goal in front of me, I could move mountains to achieve it. I would feel a sense of accomplishment, and life was grand. So, for the first 3/4 of my life, this is how it worked. Goal, after goal, after goal. Going into the service, I bought a map out of the carousel, having chosen to go into aviation. Once there, the Navy gave me a nice [flight] bag of additional maps to follow (exams, flight certifications, instructor certs, regular performance reviews, etc.).

After the Service, I chose to go to college. Once I picked a particular map from the carousel; I was given another bag of maps, routes to take, to reach an end goal. Drive I-75 South to I-40 East, to '74, to '28 to... Great. Along the way, I chose to get an MBA (more of someone else's mapping), get married, vehicles, house, and kids. Great! I had arrived.

But a funny thing began happening about then. I think it's what is loosely referred to as mid-life crisis. Now I can recognize it for what it is... Mid-life crisis isn't that we reached mid-life. Hey! That's grand. I've got my health, my house, my kids, and without question, a wife that loves me.

It's not a Mid-Life Crisis because '45' is nearby—it's not knowing what the *next* 45 look like.

The crisis then is *now what?!?!!*. Looking about me, I'm certain I'm not alone. Mid-life crisis is the result of so many having run out the maps others laid before me...covering the first 35-40 years of American Male life. Increasingly, I suspect the problem is not so tied to just 'males' nor Americans, either.

Somehow, personal life seems easy to separate from professional. At work, as a product manager, it seems relatively simple to look at market research, talk with customers and sales folk, develop a strategy, and begin moving forward—to figure out *what's next*. Personally, in many of our own lives, this seems a real challenge.

Why? In part, when you're busy with someone else's work (i.e. your 'job'), it's easy to discount the importance of paying attention to your own life. For perhaps five years, I personally struggled with the *what's next* for myself. Sound like you?

One of my prior life's roles was as a consultant. Being a consultant taught me two basic lessons. As a new consultant I was continually anxious, waiting for customer situations to begin repeating, letting me begin to 'know' what to do. In every prior job, at some point, things would begin to repeat themselves, I'd learn the new pattern, and then anxiety waned. In parallel, there was fear I'd be 'found out,' that I wasn't the expert the customer *thought* I was.

Odd thing, after about six months of consulting I came to realize two things. One, while there were some common 'components' from customer to customer, there was no two customers alike. Every one was different. The lesson learned was simply, accept there is no [map] and get on with figuring out what to do. Create my own map. Second, there's no need to fear being caught-out as a non-expert. Sure, at the onset I was relatively ignorant going in. Funny thing is—they didn't know what to do *either*—or I wouldn't be there in the first place!

Finally, after this past year of unemployment, what I learned as a consultant has taken root—personally. Perhaps it's a risk being so open with you, but I hope those of you who may experience your own mid-life crisis, or, an economically-driven life-changing crisis, can benefit.

If you're in college still, if you've selected a pre-created map with routes you want to finish traveling, by all means do so. But if the job you had went away, if the routes on your map have faded so you can't read them, stop looking. Realize *you* have to create your own map. Do the best you can to free yourself of anxiety (fear about fear), figure out what you have to offer the world, and start making your own maps.

It's Okay to use Crayons(tm). Your 5 year-old will probably lend you one or two:).

(photo credit: ***Brad Harrison***)