



Tool 29-1. Tree of Life

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Based on Chapter 29, “Why Leadership Development Should Go to School” in *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*, edited by Elaine Biech, © 2010 ASTD

Purpose: A self-empowerment exercise to help individuals and/or groups explore how they can achieve and create their desired future using their skills and resources.

Time:

30 minutes – 1.5 hour, depending on size of group

Participants:

Can be done individually or by small groups of people who have a shared identity

Supplies:

For individuals: Blank sheets of paper for individuals. Colored pens and pencils.

For groups: Flip chart paper, whiteboard, or chalkboard. Colored markers.

Instructions:

1. Ask the participants to draw and label their strengths, resources, values in the form of roots of a tree (see the example at the end of this tool). *Artistic treatments are encouraged!*
2. Next, ask the participants to draw and label their hopes, dreams, and aspirations in the form of branches of a tree.
3. Ask the participants to draw and label the trunk of the tree to symbolize what will help them achieve their dreams. Note that the trunk grows from the roots.

Optional:

4. Ask participants to write in what can threaten or destroy their tree.
5. Ask participants to draw the ground around their roots and note what external nutrients and additions can help nourish their tree, in the way that fertilizer, water, and the sun nourish a real tree.

Debrief:

1. Ask participants to share their tree with another person (or the entire group if a small group).
2. In the group ask any volunteers to share what they discovered through the exercise—about themselves, about the other person, and what they need to focus on to achieve their dreams.
3. Invite participants to journal to capture any key takeaways.
4. In a program, participants may voluntarily display their trees on a wall or table for others to browse.

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