

The psychological heritage exercise

The exercise below explains to you, what are your potential life paths, what you can easily do, and what you should be aware of as possible risks.

1. Take a big sheet of paper (for example, A1) to draw your family tree. Put yourself in the center. Create a tree as far in the past as you can. Describe the attitude, life values, roles, and behaviors of each family member whose life story you know. If you lack the information, you can consider doing research and discussing the past of your family. It could be an amazing topic for a family gathering.

When you will write down the person's story think about the following ways to describe him/her:

- Did your relative like the changes or preferred stability?

Had he/ she been changing a lot the work (craft, profession), a place to live, partner? Did he/she like traveling; was he/she adventurous and adaptive to the new setting, political system, or society; did he/she like to go out of her comfort zone or prefer to stay in the comfort zone?

- Did he/she have an entrepreneurial mindset vs. working for someone mindset?

Was your ancestor entrepreneurial or not? Did he/she create his own business or workshop? If he/she inherited a business and kept it well, such as, for example, a farm, you can count it as a business mindset as well.

- Did he/she have an expert role in the family or in society?

Usually, people with the expert role are teachers, consultants, professors, writers, priests, and just wise people from whom others seek advice. They like education, books, talking, sharing their knowledge with others, and teaching others. The people with an expert role are often very social.

- Had he/she a role in helping others?

These people usually work as doctors, nurses, and priests, they participate in charity, adopt kids, animals, etc. They just can not live without dedicating their life to others. Often they are kind and very hardworking people. Sometimes they are overused by family members because of their kindness and inability to say “no”.

- Did he/she have ambitions for wealth and social status?

In the past social status was closely linked with wealth. Was your ancestor dreaming about accumulating wealth and/or putting the family name higher on a social ladder? Probably this longing resulted in a life full of restrictions in order not to accumulate more. Or did he/she spend the fortune remained from family?

Sometimes, you can meet these stories of self-made nobles, who earned the new status with hard work and wisdom. Self-taught people because they had a dream to move higher on the social ladder. Do you have these stories in your family?

- Was he/she resilient? Did he/she have a skill of survival?

The last century was full of war and poverty horrors. Most of our ancestors had survival skills because we are alive now. However, could you check if you had someone in the family who did exceptional, nearly impossible to survive and secure the survival of the family? Probably, some of you had a grandgrandma who managed to raise many kids alone in an occupied country. How about a granddad who survived in captivity? Etc.

- Did your relative have a leadership practice?

Here by leadership practice, I mean if he/she happened to be in a situation of managing successfully other people. It could be running a farm, a workshop, a factory, a division in the army, etc. For women leaders, it was often a practice of successfully running a household.

- Did he/she have family values or family wasn't important for him/her?

You know the notion of "family man". Was your ancestor a family man? Or did he/she prefer to be a bachelor all his life? Probably, you have these uncles and aunts, who choose not to form a family.

After the tree is created, you can look at it and think about reoccurring patterns. Both negative and positive. What was common for many of your ancestors you have now as a heritage. If many of your relatives were successful businessmen, you most likely will be successful in business. If many of your relatives had adventures in the blood, you have them as well. The family tree written in such a way will help you to understand more about yourself and your roots. It can help you to relate with your relatives and acknowledge their life experiences.

Example

Psychological heritage
(example)

