



## Why Network Mapping is So Powerful

by Shawn Young

In the chapter planting handbook, *Start Something New*, there is an exercise that leads the readers to map their relationships. I am convinced that one of the most essential and simple skills a Christian can develop is to chart their relational networks. Here are some reasons why.

### *Network Mapping Inspires People*

Usually, after ten minutes of drawing our relational networks, we are surprised by how many people we know in each of the places we frequently connect with. When two or more people sit down together to map their *combined* networks, it is even more exciting. They begin to see how they can partner together to reach a significant population. It's not hard for a few friends to come up with over 100 names in just a few minutes. Few things can so quickly reveal your immediate mission field!

### *It's Insightful*

A chart with a bunch of places and names suddenly becomes very useful when you start asking some questions about the people you have connected with. When using these questions, I like to use different colored pens to circle, underline or highlight different groupings of people so I can get a visual sense of where the spiritual activity and potential lays:

- Who is already a follower of Jesus and therefore a **potential partner** in reaching others in a network? When can you ask them to add their names to your Network Map?
- Who seems **open or interested** in exploring who Jesus is, and what it means to follow Him? What would be a natural next step for them?
- Who knows you are a Christian? Who knows **why** you are a Christian (because you have explained it to them)?
- Who have you **invited** to something?
- Looking over the whole map, where do you see the most spiritual potential?
- Which people in your networks are **strong connectors** to further networks?

### *It's a Spiritual Act*

With these insights, your Network Map can become a great tool for **prayer**. It's easy to pick a place, a grouping of people or an observation you have made and pray for the people God has placed in your life. Some deeper questions you should ask God when you pray:

- What do you want me/us to **see** here?
- Why have you placed these particular people in our lives?
- Is there a place or people group you want to **send us** to?
- What is **your vision** for these people? What do you want to see happen among them?
- What have you given us that we should pass on to them?
- What do we need to do to **prepare** ourselves? Is there an attitude, a skill or some knowledge we need to be effective in this? Is there something we need to repent of, or let go?

This is the real power of a Network Map. It helps you to see what God Himself is up to. You start to see all the people in your life as part of something wonderful God is doing. You can see yourself as God's partner, messenger and co-worker. We are beginning to "lift up our eyes" to see "the field is ripe for harvest" (John 4:35).

## It Transforms Discipleship

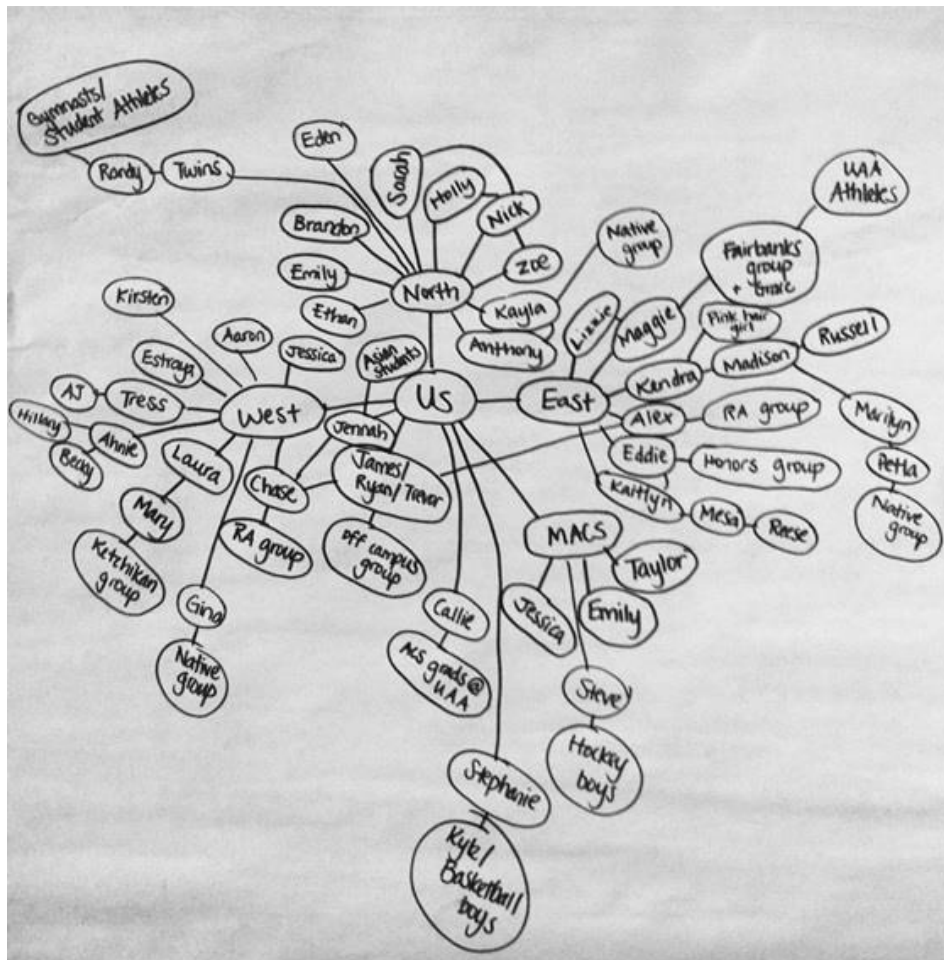
Once you have created your Network Map, you can teach others to do it. By the simple act of helping them map their networks and praying for God's vision, you are **developing the missional muscles** of other Christians. There is nothing more potent or practical in a discipleship relationship. If you lead a small group bible study, you can use poster paper, or post-its on a wall (I have even seen groups use 3x5 cards connected with yarn to visualize their combined networks); anything that helps the group identify the people God has placed in their lives and discern what the group can do next to partner with God. It is the first major step in helping a small group gain a tangible sense of its mission. As the group identifies where God is moving, they can start to intentionally engage the right networks.

## It Elevates the Mundane

Network Maps help us identify where God is already at work in all the places we live and work and study every day. It takes our place in the world seriously—it assumes God has ordained our current situation, and looks with expectancy that He has good things prepared for us to do in these places. As we learn how to recognize the Spirit's movement all around us and cooperate with Him in our familiar environment, we begin to fulfill our calling in life. God is transforming us, and impacting the world around us.

## It's Time to Try It

Why not take the first step in becoming a world-changer right now? All you need is a blank piece of paper and a pen (or if you have them, a few colored pens). Write your name in the middle. Then name the places (outside your Christian group or church) where you interact with people on a fairly frequent basis. Next, start writing down names of people you know around each of those places. Here's an actual Network Map by two students:



### *The First Step in Multiplying Small Groups*

Network Mapping is a great first step in helping small groups multiply. Here's why: the group can discern who has the relational networks and where God is moving. They can then make wise decisions about how to begin intentionally reaching out to the right networks. They may decide to send a couple members of the group to launch a new group, while the original group supports their efforts. This is a much better way to begin multiplying than simply deciding to split down the middle and try to create two separate smaller groups that have no vision propelling them forward.

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[Why Network Mapping is So Powerful](#) is posted on the [Collegiate Ministries website](#) with related resources for InterVarsity staff and student leaders.