

Writing used to limit conflicts

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MENDHAM TWP. - Jeanne Rice has been a professional writer and executive coach for more than 25 years, whether it was for CNN or for major corporations.

But it was a personal tragedy which led her to find another path for her writing that she hopes will be therapeutic for others both on personal and professional levels.

Rice is a certified journal facilitator, which means she teaches people how to write themselves to better self-understanding.

Her work is for anybody, with or without any writing abilities, who wants to further their understanding of themselves.

The growing field of reflective writing is being used in various arenas, from helping teens at risk, drug addicts, abused women and women in prison to corporate wellness programs.

The process includes 18 specific techniques that take five to seven minutes each, based on a program developed by the psychotherapist and author, Kathleen Adams.

"Reflective writing is emerging as a powerful tool in therapy," Rice said. "You can't write your way to happiness but this can give you the perspective to move on."

Conflicts Surface

The process can potentially uncover buried conflicts and Rice said she can refer people to a network of therapists for further treatment.

She also tells people that if they are currently seeing a therapist to let the therapist know they are participating in the reflective writing program.

The process is not as simple as the traditional diary where



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most people write by stream of consciousness and with no specific goals or structure.

Rice was in Wheat Ridge, Colo., for the last week in October, where she completed a program at the Kathleen Adams Center.

Adams began the program in 1990 after she published her best-selling, popular book, "Journal to the Self."

Rice's group included 10 women with about half psychologists and therapists and others lay people.

She left with a certification in the program which includes a series of 18 specific writing techniques.

The basic premise is that with guidance and structure, people can improve self-understanding through writing.

It is a tool to awareness not unlike meditation, yoga, exercise or art.

"The answers are always inside but people are always searching outside," Rice said.

During the week's training, participants took turns practicing how to facilitate each of the 18 techniques or tools.

They learned how as facilitators then can work with challenging people and help them tap into their strengths and understand their conflicts through writing.

The techniques are varied. One is called "lists of 100," in which participants take 20 minutes to create a list of 100 things

that are either preventing them from succeeding or present conflicts they want to resolve.

"The key is to keep writing," Rice said.

Even if the participant is stuck, he should note that and keep writing until the "self-editing mode" is turned off. Participants then read and categorize their lists to analyze the categories.

"It opens your eyes to your real blocks," Rice said.

Another technique is "dialogue." Participants take seven minutes to write a dialogue with a person or thing with which they are in conflict.

It can be a husband or co-worker or a malfunctioning car. After the seven minutes, participants privately review their dialogues.

"It can be extremely cathartic," Rice said.

A third technique is character sketching in which participants take five to seven minutes to write about a friend.

The sketches are designed to be given as a holiday gift to a friend or loved one.

Rice said the technique can help people tap into deeper wisdom about the meaning of the holidays.

Corporate Background

Rice got involved in reflective writing indirectly. She had been helping corporate executives with speeches and other presentations and she saw a common problem.

"They were always trying to say what they thought the audience wanted or the corporate line," Rice said. "They were never convincing."

Rice knew that executives would convey a more effective message if the message was honest.

"I found the more they wrote about their passions, that they came to a statement that

worked," Rice said.

Then her father died and she was looking for something to help her deal with her grief when she came upon a book written by psychologist James Pennebaker called "Writing to Heal."

One of the book's exercises was particularly helpful for Rice.

It involved writing for 20 minutes a day for four days and repeating the pattern until she better understood herself.

It is a form of therapy that has worked well helping people deal with trauma.

"They find that their health improves if they can write with a hope for the future or with detachment," Rice said.

Rice learned about Adams through Pennebaker's writing and subsequently contacted Adams to learn more about the process.

She plans to offer workshops to non-profit groups and to focus on business ethics with corporations.

"I hear a lot of talking about values and ethics," she said. "To get people to make truly ethical decisions they have to tap into their own core values."

Rice will host her first workshop, "Rekindle Your Holiday Spirit," on Saturday, Dec. 3, at the Willow School in Peapack-Gladstone.

Another workshop for "Women in Transition" is planned for after the new year to focus on issues such as divorce, empty nests, job loss, aging and death of loved ones.

"It's about women becoming comfortable with where they are in life," Rice said.

Rice also is available to host free, 45 minute programs for non-profit organizations.

For information, call (973) 219-2580 or visit www.ReflectiveWritingCoach.com.