

# Enter the Paper Room to discover the patterns for your success

by Lauren Chuslo-Shur

We have rooms for just about every thing: bedrooms for sleeping dining rooms for eating, studies and dens for work and reading. But we don't have a room dedicated to developing and designing our career paths.

Until now that is. Enter "The Paper Room," the brain child of Sydney Rice of The Coaching Company.

Like other rooms, the Paper Room has windows, walls, a floor, ceiling, and one thing you're not likely to find anywhere else: paper and lots of it. Large white rolls hang like wallpaper on three sides of a bright, welcoming room in Rice's 287-year-old antique colonial in West Newbury, Mass. where she works and resides.

In the space of 3 1/2 hours, this "wallpaper" will take on a pattern full of words and colors and pictures designed to help a person map out a successful career path in line with their personal goals, needs and principles. A person is literally surrounded by the words which describe them, phrases that identify patterns in work, in how one works, in what one needs to be successful and fulfilled in their career.

The Paper Room is a place of discovery that continues even after you leave. Rice gives you the wallpaper to take with you for two weeks of homework, in which you hang your paper in your study or bedroom and read your life, consider your strengths and areas to work on, prioritize your goals in relation to your principles, then make connections and conclusions. Next, you return to the Paper Room for a final 1 1/2-hour session with the coach who helps you bring it all together.

If it sounds like a momentous and difficult undertaking, it is. Having undergone the process, I can tell you that it requires honesty and careful consideration. If it sounds a bit new age, it isn't. It's new, it's unique, but it has been proven by more than 200 participants, based on a process that considers you, the individual rather than a general Cosmopolitan Magazine-type test full of multiple choice questions, some of which don't have answer you would choose. It does sound abstract, but the purpose and the end result are practical:

- To provide an avenue to intentionally access your identified strengths.
- To give you the ability to redesign what you do so that it provides satisfaction, productive feedback and those conditions that motivate you.
- To provide a concrete way to evaluate work opportunities and challenges to help you choose for success.

"We all have patterns of doing and seeing things which are reflected in our work," says Rice who has 20 years experience here and on the West Coast. She has founded three successful businesses, held senior positions in the corporate world and led educational seminars. "Some of the patterns work to our advantage," Rice continues, "and others can unknowingly sabotage our hard work."

If you want your hard work to pay off, then you need to work hard in the Paper Room. Your first task once you sit in your chair and look at the mostly empty white wallpaper is to



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list your and short- and long-term goals. Rice writes both on a single sheet between two windows. The first few may come easily, but she encourages you to expand your boundaries, to dream. This is a room where you are safe and free to be.

As you list your goals, Rice asks probing questions to clarify what you mean and what you want. Her questions are not leading, but literally facilitate thought so that you list all the things important to you now and in the future. While you're thinking, she illustrates existing goals to add color and dimension to your list.

According to Rice, this first phase of the process is "left-brain" thinking because you are gathering information which is primarily a linear activity. However, this exercise is the precursor to discovery, "right brain" work which identifies relationships and associations based on the information listed on your wallpaper.

When you've finished your goals, you move on to family. "Most of how we feel about ourselves, our core perceptions and assumptions about ourselves and 'how life is' was learned in our family of origin. We learned these things before we were able to discriminate or compare our world to others . . . We emerged into adulthood knowing what we liked and didn't, having resolved never to do some things while aspiring to do others. The rest was folded into our perceptual concept of life. We call it 'of course.' Of course that's the way it is, or, of course that's the way it is done.

***In the paper Room, you uncover deeply lived assumptions. "Simply identifying them as assumption – rather than 'of course' – opens up a world of personal choice that could not otherwise be possible," says Sydney Rice.***

In the process of using this map, we can uncover these deeply lived assumptions. Simply identifying them as assumption – rather than 'of course' – opens up a world of personal choice that could not otherwise be possible."

The telling question Rice asks about family is how do certain important members view you – not what you think of them, but what you think they think of you.

The next area of exploration is what Rice calls your "Top Ten." Coming up with three may be easy, but 10 is not only difficult, it requires probing which can, at least in my experience, lead to some immediate insights: the top 10 most memorable,

most fulfilling, the absolute best 10 moments or experiences in my life. And these lead to needs and values.

Your answers in the needs and values section are paramount, since they point out what brings you satisfaction. What you value should also be reflected in your work environment, including the people with whom you work.

"Not having these core needs met can cause burn-out, and emotional discord," Rice says. "Having these things present is reflected in your ability to confidently move forward, accept challenges and feel fulfilled and grounded in life."

The next step is the easiest: listing your work history – who you worked for, what you did, how you obtained the job, how long you were there and why you left. According to Rice, this exercise shows what is predictable. The information reflects how you habitually get results and react to particular conditions or situations," Rice says. "Many of us have some embarrassment about our work history. Take this opportunity to look at your history for its strengths and richness."

After taking Polaroids of the wallpaper you designed, Rice then pulls it down, rolls it up and gives it to you to use at home. She also provides specific homework guidelines to help you identify patterns and come to conclusions.

I wallpapered my bedroom so I could sit on my bed and study my patterns. I went to sleep looking at my long- and short-term goals and woke up to them each morning. As I dressed, I'd see my top 10 and my needs and values, which seemed to tell me the most about what wanted and how I wanted to get there. I sat on my bed and answered the questions Rice had given me, pages of answers. I came to conclusions, one of which was that I liked where I was working now, but I needed to develop some kind of support group because of the somewhat isolated nature of my work.

One of the most important things I discovered was that I was actually on the right track. However, adjustments did need to be made to repair that track and maintain it for a smoother and faster ride.

When you return to the Paper Room, homework in hand, Rice sits down with you and asks what you would like from her, what kind of coaching you need. Then, for the next hour and a half, you have her undivided attention again, along with her Insights, suggestions and observations, taped if you'd like.

You leave the Paper Room with clear goals and strategies to help you achieve them. And with the Polaroids of your wallpaper, the Paper Room stays with you wherever you go.

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