

Kathleen Adams, *The Center for Journal Therapy*

Journal-Keeping

It's no wonder that most
great people in history
have kept journals



The exercise of writing down reflections about events experienced each day is an invaluable way to evaluate your performance...set higher standards of excellence...and find new ways to solve difficult problems.

WHAT A JOURNAL CAN DO

Many people resist keeping a journal because they think they aren't good enough writers...that someone will read their innermost thoughts...or that they have much more important things to do.

But unless you are able to evaluate your feelings and abilities and accept self-criticism, you probably won't bother to improve your weaknesses or build on your strengths.

Instead of thinking of a journal as a diary—a book in which you merely relate the day's events—think of it as a container for self-reflection, self-expression and self-exploration. Retelling the day's events is less relevant than the act of expressing your thoughts.

Just thinking about your emotions will enable you to shape them. *Powerful benefits of keeping a journal...*

• **Self-expression.** In a journal, you are able to express what you feel in ways that may be too difficult or even impossible at work or at home.

• **Stress reduction.** Expressing your anger in writing releases the emotional pressure that builds up when you hold feelings inside. Many people say they feel calmer and spiritually at ease after a journal-writing session.

• **Stronger relationships.** Writing about people you know will help you understand them better and put you in touch with your own feelings about them. When you're furious with

someone close to you, discharging raw emotion in the privacy of the page enables you to work out solutions in advance rather than face to face in an irrational outburst.

• **Better organizational skills.** By structuring yourself to write regularly, you automatically develop stronger organization skills, such as list-making and time management. Needs and goals are also easier to clarify and prioritize once they are written down on paper.

RULES OF JOURNALING

Keeping a journal is first and foremost an exercise in creative freedom.

Some people are inspired by an elegant bound notebook with fine paper, while others feel more comfortable letting the words flow onto loose-leaf sheets that can be clipped into a binder. Others prefer to record their thoughts on a computer.

You can schedule 30 minutes with your journal at the same time each evening...or just pick up a pen when the mood strikes you. *Easy ways to get started...*

• **Put yourself in the mood.** Close your eyes, and take five deep breaths. This focuses your vision inward, clears a space in your mind, eases the transition from workday reality to contemplation. Ask yourself, *What am I feeling at this moment?*

• **Jot down a few lines to summarize the high or low points of your day.** This exercise is equivalent to

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Kathleen Adams, a psychotherapist in private practice in Denver and director of The Center for Journal Therapy in Arvada, Colorado. The center offers workshops, training and consultations on reflective writing. 888-421-2298.

She is author of *Journal to the Self* (Warner Books/\$11.99).



