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“We Need able brains to match able bodies.”

‘Brain Studio’ helps with memory

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Few things panic the over-50 age group more than suddenly forgetting things. Thoughts of Alzheimer’s and other degenerative brain diseases spring to mind and many people feel powerless to reverse the downhill slide.

A new workshop at the Ridgewood YMCA is aimed at helping people of all ages improve their memories. “The Brain Studio” is a trademarked course developed and taught by Reena Chawla, who has already trained 270 people in her methods.

Although she was educated as an engineer in New Delhi, India, Chawla has found that helping people improve their memories is her true calling. The young mother was troubled herself at one point with memory problems related to the stresses of her career. She discovered techniques that helped her immensely and that she was also able to use to help her own grandmother.

At the first class, held recently at the YMCA, five participants were seated around a table eager to learn. They listened attentively while Chawla explained her philosophy.

“We need able brains to match able bodies,” she said. She then asked the group to consider her their personal trainer, whom they could call at home for more advice and encouragement.

Next she placed nine objects on the table – pliers, a crayon, a pencil, a battery, a “Happy Birthday” card, a candle, a battery, a comb and a tube of toothpaste. She asked the participants to take a close look and after a minute removed the objects. The not unexpected next step was for the participants to attempt to write down all the objects. Results varied widely. Some group members knew everything and some seemed even more stressed at learning how few items they were able to remember.

Chawla reassured everybody that they will become more proficient at remembering if they commit to following her program. “It’s important to organize and have a clutter-free brain,” she said. “You have to pay attention and use the strengths you are blessed with to help you remember. It’s like driving down a new road – you should slow down and observe.”



GARY JUNG/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Reena Chawla, standing, leads Brain Studio participants in mental exercises.

And roads were just what were troubling some of the participants. One woman volunteered that she can’t go to new places anymore because she can’t remember how to follow the directions to get there.

“Don’t be mean to yourself!” Chawla responded in a kind voice. “Don’t say ‘I can’t do anything new,’ or you won’t be able to,” she continued. Her techniques include positive reinforcement and challenges. “If we do not put ourselves in somewhat frustrating situations sometimes, our brain doesn’t learn new things,” she explained.

To heighten the participants’ perceptions, she uses blindfolds and earplugs. She noted that with the absence of one sense, people become more observant with the remaining ones. “When they smell a strawberry while blindfolded they say ‘I feel that I can see it!’ They learn to pay more attention and that helps in developing their memories.” Many more games and exercises await the participants in the course.

Carol Livingstone, health and fitness director at the YMCA, is very pleased with the Brain Studio

workshop so far. “I like offering this course in conjunction with all the fitness programs that we have,” she noted.

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