

#48 – This One’s for the Women Who Do Too Much with Pete Sidley

Donna Ferris: [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose after difficulty. I'm your host, Donna Ferris. And today, we have Pete Sidley, a leader in the healing and wellness field, with us. A little about Pete.

Since 1994, Pete has been co-facilitating the groundbreaking living-in-process healing work created by acclaimed author Dr. Anne Wilson Schaaf. Today, he serves as president of Wilson Schaaf Associates, Inc. Pete has dedicated over 25 years to the living-in-process mission, continuing to facilitate these transformative groups worldwide even after Anne's passing in 2020.

Thank you for joining us on Bounce Back Stronger. I'm so grateful to have you on the podcast.

Pete Sidley: Thank you for having me.

Donna Ferris: Ah, it's good to have you and we met because I reached out to see if Anne could be on the podcast and was sad to realize that [00:01:00] she had already passed. So thank you for making time to meet with me.

Pete Sidley: Sure. Yeah, it was sad for all of us that she passed. She was a great person and a great writer. We still read her books all the time. And I, you know, people used to say that she was 50 years old before her time. And it's really coming true now. Like a lot of the books she wrote in the 80s. People are starting to talk about those different things she was writing about now.

And it's like, it's, it's almost more timely now, some of the things she wrote. So yeah, she's, she was a great loss to this planet, I think.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. Well I'm just going to put the book up. It's not going to be easy to see, but this is the book that I was reaching out about it's called “Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much.”

I recommend this book all the time. It is one of the three books I read every morning. One is not enough for me, so I have to go through a few of them. And I love her wisdom. I don't think it's just for women. I think it's for all of us to do too much.

But maybe if you could take a moment, is [00:02:00] that one of the books that you hear a lot about from people?

Pete Sidley: Well, yes, so, and that book was actually the idea of her publisher, and the first book that she wrote was called *Women's Reality*, and it was written in 1981, and she actually wrote that book in about five days.

Donna Ferris: Wow.

Pete Sidley: Yeah, that was a great book. And in that, she started writing about, how she saw the world and the different systems that she sees going on in the world. At that point, she called it the white male system, the reactive female system and an emerging female system, three, three different systems she wrote about in that book. And she wrote a few more books. And then her publisher came to her in the early, late eighties to write that book.

It was supposed to be about workaholism for women who were workaholics. It was really just a taste of her worldview. And somehow, that particular book hit a nerve and sold several million.

Donna Ferris: It did, my nerves, it got me.

Pete Sidley: Yeah, what woman doesn't do too much.

Donna Ferris: [00:03:00] Yeah, exactly. Especially if they're working outside of the home too. We have enough to do at home and then you add going outside it, yeah, it's a lot.

Pete Sidley: Absolutely. So yeah, that book is still selling and we still hear about that all the time. And even though it was like a quote unquote, little meditation book.

Donna Ferris: I love that book. But what was great is I didn't know much about living in process. And, interestingly enough, I'm sober, too. So I'd love to hear about living in process and the types of events that you're leading now.

Pete Sidley: Okay, well I'm going to give you a little bit of the history then about living in process.

So, Ann was Cherokee and her parents didn't tell her that. She, you know, they could pass for white and she was born in 1934 and that was a time where the residential schools were happening down there, and the Indian kids were being

taken. And one of the ways that her family protected her was to not tell her she was Cherokee.

Yeah. Even though they raised her in a very traditional Cherokee way.

[00:04:00] Her family did a lot of traveling around, but a large part of it was in Arkansas, Oklahoma territory, you know, Cherokee country. And so when she was a young girl, she knew that she wanted to be a healer of some sort or something like that.

That led her into Psychotherapy, and so she got her PhD, and she trained as a psychologist, and after a while, she left the field. She found that psychotherapy helped people to adapt to an addictive system, to a system that we have created that isn't good for us.

And so she started doing the Living In Process work, and it was based on her Cherokee upbringing and what she learned from her own experiences in the field of psychotherapy. She started doing it in, in the late 70s, early 80s,

It's been going on for that long. It's a different paradigm. It doesn't come from the same scientific worldview that therapy does. And it's really healing. We [00:05:00] talk about three different components in the living process, and I'll touch on them very briefly.

One is recovery from addictions. In this society that we live in, as I mentioned earlier, Ann had talked about the white male system and the emerging female system and, in her later books, named the white male system an addictive system and the technological material mechanistic system.

She's sort of naming the same thing in all three of those names, which is the dominant system that we're living in now. And one of the requirements of that system is that we be addicted to not knowing what we know, not feeling what we feel, not thinking what we think, and not being who we can be.

One of the main components of Living in Process is to look at what we might be addicted to and start recovering from that. What we found is that the 12-step programs are what we have seen as to be the most effective for people recovering from addictions.

And it's [00:06:00] not the only way. And, as you probably may know, there are now 12-step meetings for every letter of the alphabet, practically. There are so many different groups for different types of addictions. And that's a big part of what we deal with. And then, we go beyond the 12-step groups.

There are places in our workshops for people to actually feel their feelings, for example, or go into what we call deep process work to deal with what comes up when they get sober—basically, the feelings that come up. And unlike AA or other groups, those 12-step programs are awesome. They're designed by addicts for addicts, and there is no place in the 12-step meetings for feelings, really, and that's fine.

And what we do is put mats around the room that we meet in, and if something comes up, we have a place for them to deal with it. The third component of living processes is really making a complete paradigm shift.

One of the latest books that Anne wrote before she died was Daily Reminders for Living a New Paradigm. It's really a whole way of living that's [00:07:00] different. A lot of it is based on her upbringing. The Cherokee or Native American way is really quite different from the dominant system here.

Donna Ferris: Is that a meditation book too?

Pete Sidley: Yeah, it is. Yeah. I think the way that she set it up was she came up with 30 different topics, and then each month she builds on the topic.

Let's say awareness. You know, she might write about that on June 3rd. And then on February 3rd, she builds on that a little bit, and then March 3rd. And so it goes throughout the year. And we read it all the time. It's fantastic. And it didn't get much press, but it's really a great book.

Donna Ferris: I'll have to read it. In your description of living in process. The feelings piece. I have people come up with the feeling, like, what do I do with this feeling all the time? Can you take a minute on that? About some of the ways people can process their feelings in a safe and healthy way?

Pete Sidley: Sure. The biggest thing that I suggest or that the way that we do it [00:08:00] is to stay with it. Like, if you're feeling, stay with it, feel it, often at our workshops, we'll say anything can trigger a feeling; sometimes, you may be sitting there, and somebody walks in the room, and you instantly hate them.

And it's like, great, stay with that, see what that's about, and go with it. We had a meeting the other day, and somebody in our group was talking about how to express their anger. We don't really go that route exactly.

In some ways, we're more simple than that. It's like, feel it, like, stay with it. If you stay with your anger, for example, it will take you somewhere else. If you

just stay with it and do not try to figure it out and do not try to blame somebody else or blame yourself, you will simply stay with it and go with it.

What we say is that this often leads to what we call a deep process. Whatever the initial feeling may be, it may lead to something totally different. One of the things we say about deep process work is that it bypasses the left brain. It's not something that we try to control [00:09:00], manage, or manipulate.

We stay with it, see where it goes, and take time with it, especially in our workshops and training groups. We take time to stay with the feelings as long as necessary. Some people stay with a certain feeling for several days or weeks, just to see what it is.

They're not bad, and sometimes, certain feelings get labeled as bad, like anger. I just want to stay with it and see where it goes. I believe a lot of times, people in our groups, including myself, feel like that's the place where we connect with our higher power the most.

It's really by feeling the feeling, taking us through our deep process, and just seeing what it comes up with.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, I always think feelings are teaching us something. We're having an intense response to something, and we probably need to think about what that is.

Pete Sidley: Well, I would stay away from thinking about it. I would stay with the feeling because often our thinking stops us. Sometimes people come in, and they have agendas about This is what I need to work [00:10:00] on. I need to work on this and that'll often keep them stuck. It's like if we stay with the feelings and let go of our thinking and see where it takes us.

Then, I agree with you that we can learn something. And often it's after we've done the process that like, Oh, that's what's going on. I'm still holding on to this or I experienced sometimes people process old childhood things or old, pain of the earth things.

Donna Ferris: So what does the processing look like?

Pete Sidley: Well, it's different for different people. It's as individual as anything. Sometimes, people will stretch out on a mat, and they'll be there for five minutes, and that's it.

Sometimes, people don't want to go to the mats; they'll sit in their chairs and do whatever. Sometimes, people will stay on the mats. We have people who come to an intensive and may stay on the mat for three days. They may scream and cry for part of it or not, or they may be silent.

Again, we don't have a prescription of how it's supposed to be, or an agenda of how it's supposed to be, and some people they're [00:11:00] so far away from their feelings, they don't have any, they don't know. I mean, myself included, when I started doing this work, I was told, what do you feel?

And I was like, well, what do you mean? You know, and like, what do you feel? And I was like, what do you mean? I don't know. I don't feel anything. My toes are cold, and that was the best I could have come up with. And we see that people, I have no awareness of what they feel.

Donna Ferris: Oh, I agree with that.

When I started doing yoga, one of the first things that really kind of stopped me was when somebody at the beginning of class said, "How do you feel?" And I hadn't thought about it.

Pete Sidley: Yeah, that's okay.

Donna Ferris: I had no idea.

Pete Sidley: I think that's, required for the addictive system is that we don't feel, what we feel,

The best-adjusted person in this society is a robot. Yeah. You know, someone that doesn't, isn't dead but isn't alive.

Donna Ferris: Which is why Sharon Salzberg says the most important thing is to be aware, you know, her whole thing is, when you're doing meditation, we all drift [00:12:00] away in a few breaths, but it's the awareness that we've been gone.

And I think that's the same thing with addiction. It's the awareness that you've been gone and trying to numb something you're feeling. And it's hard to be aware. I think that's one of the hardest things to do is to know what's happening.

Pete Sidley: Yeah, I think so. When Anne was writing *Living in Process*, *Living in Process* is a whole system, and it was hard for her and the publishers

to get together because the publishers wanted answers in a real mechanistic square book.

And it was like putting a round ball into a square, hole. And at one point, as they were sort of negotiating how to write the book, they suggested to her, you know, can you just give us some ideas or what people might do and that was really hard.

And after wrestling with it for a while, one of the things that she came up with was noticing. Like awareness, like noticing when you feel anything or when you have to go to the bathroom. There's many people that, don't know when they [00:13:00] have to go to the bathroom, or don't know when they're tired.

I think that that is a big part of starting and living the Living in Process work. I agree with noticing what you feel or how or where you're at.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. Noticing we've been away.

How did you get involved with Anne?

Pete Sidley: Well, I went to college at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and I happened to be there when Anne was living there.

And so I was, bottoming out in my life and unhappy at the school and dah, dah, dah. And I got Anne's name from my mom. My mom was living in Minnesota, and she knew someone who knew Anne. And so I called her up and, this was in the mid eighties.

I started doing the living and process work back then, and I did the work for a while, living in Colorado. Then, in the late eighties and early nineties, Ann bought an old Hot Springs hotel in Montana. And so I came up and lived there, which is actually [00:14:00] where I am right now.

I started working with her and traveling with her. That was in the early nineties.

Donna Ferris: And you've been doing it for that whole time.

Pete Sidley: Yep. The whole time. And I've loved it. It was great. And it just was a real gift to be around her.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, I imagine. One of the things I think we've been touching around is this idea of reconnecting with spiritual wisdom. Can you talk about that? It feels like that's a big part of this as well.

Pete Sidley: I think Anne used to talk about how the Living in Process work goes beyond the rituals and ceremonies.

It's, like, older than that. Yeah, it's, it's like, all of us have inside of us that deep wisdom. And again, I think that the addictions and the crazy system we're living in. I think part of the system we're living in is just this crazy thinking, you know, dualistic thinking and self [00:15:00] centeredness. One of Anne's books was called "When Society Becomes An Addict," and that was a New York Times bestseller. That is so timely right now. The society is acting like an addict, and I think all the components of addicts are in society right now.

And those are the kinds of things that keep us from our wisdom, our spirituality. You know, it's like being addicted and caught up in all the drama and the technology and all kinds of things that keep us away from who we really are. And I think that's where we connect with our spirituality.

It's who we are and within ourselves.

Donna Ferris: And we already know the answers inside us, right? But we can't get out of our own way to find them.

Pete Sidley: I think that's part of it. Yeah.

Donna Ferris: What are some other common challenges you see

Pete Sidley: Well, the addictive process is very far-reaching, far and wide. One of the issues is that we have it in ourselves. It's not [00:16:00] just in the culture. And being demanded of us from outside. It's also within us. We have a woman here at the Hot Springs. She's in our groups, and she's wonderful.

It's really interesting to watch how she has these beliefs that she's no good. We've called her on her thought process around it, and she gets into a sort of circular thing in her head about how she's no good.

We also see people move past that when they're willing to do their deep process work and often find something else. That's a big one: People are carrying this sort of addictive system inside of them, and there's not a lot of support, either.

Many times, people will come and have a partner who doesn't want them to be here. They don't want them to get well. They want to keep them in the relationship. And so that sometimes is an issue. I think a lot of times, there are so many other things going on that a lot of times people will come to our workshops and think they already know what it is.

And that's a [00:17:00] big one. That's a big stopper, so, you know, there's certain, there's certain things that, that we see that are stoppers. Let me just mention one other of Anne's books one of her last books was called, "There'll Be a Thousand Years of Peace and Prosperity, and it Will Be Ushered in by the Women."

Donna Ferris: I love that.

Pete Sidley: It's a great book. In there, she talks about stoppers; in this particular case, she's talking about women. Like what women tell themselves that stop them, you know? And that's a lot that we see in the groups is that people are just their own stoppers.

Thinking is a big problem—yes, a huge problem. In Western culture, we have really learned to think ourselves into a hole. And yeah, it often doesn't make any sense. And so, again, the deep process work goes beyond that. It's a process.

You can't get it at one workshop.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, I bet.

There are a couple of things there, but I'm a big believer in one. You are the sum of the five people you are [00:18:00] around a lot in your surroundings.

And that's why it's so important to be really careful about that. And, what you said about being around people who don't want you to get better. And it's really important to have people around you that are invested in, or at least supportive of, your recovery.

I do really believe that. The other thing I have to ask - there are so many books here that are all about women. How does it feel to be in the center of that and talking about that?

Pete Sidley: That's a funny question. Yeah.

I guess the first thing that comes up for me is that very early on, Ann used to say something like, if she were a man, her books might've been more well received.

Donna Ferris: And I love that,

Pete Sidley: I started working with her again in the early nineties.

And this work has always been primarily women, the first training group, as we call the people that really wanted. You know, learn how to live in the process. The first group I was in, I think there was [00:19:00] maybe 45 women and 5 men. Mostly, I really like it.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, I bet you do. Yeah, I could see that.

I like the way she talks about women's being a reactive process, but there's also a connection there in that reactivity that, we can actually move beyond it. And it's social.

We've been socialized to be more in touch with our feelings, which might help us. I don't know if that resonates.

Pete Sidley: Yeah, one time, a number of years ago, I attended a speaking tour in Europe with a woman named Rose Perry, a Maori; she was like a Maori spiritual woman from New Zealand.

One of her main things was that women are 5 000 years ahead of the men. And I actually can see that. This culture has really damaged women, and this culture has damaged men. I've really grown much more as a person by especially hanging out with Ann, but [00:20:00] most people that I've hung out with are women in the network.

And it's been good for me. I believe there'll be a thousand years of peace and prosperity, and the women'll usher them in, and sometimes I do think, well, I might be more effective in my role if I was a woman. And that's the way it is, you know, I am who I am.

I was the one that Anne asked to co-facilitate, and it is what it is, so I deal with it.

Donna Ferris: Well, you were meant to be there, obviously, but I can't ask the question because I know it's; it's probably in the listener's mind, but if it means anything, it sounds like at least to me that Ann picked well.

Is there anything I missed that I should have asked as we start to draw to a close?

Pete Sidley: One of the things I'd mentioned is just a little bit more about the paradigm shift, that it's really a whole way of being, and that we don't have any techniques or answers. Just before the call, I was reading the Intro to “Women Who Do Too Much Again,” and she talked about that, in the intro of the book, like, I don't have any answers, and it's about a process. Sometimes when we meet here at [00:21:00] this place, the Boulder Hot Springs, there'll be issues with the building. And we'll deal with the issues of the building because that's what is happening. We believe that we can't heal the people without healing the building, and we can't heal the building without healing the land, and we can't heal the land without healing the people.

And so it's all part of it, and the animals, all the birds, and all creation are part of healing. And so when we look at it on all levels, you know, not just psychological or mental, you know, we look at everything.

Donna Ferris: It's really helpful. It's all connected, right? That's, yeah, that's, that's the basis here.

Well, if a person like me wanted to buy a book to start, what book would you suggest that I buy to understand living and the process?

Pete Sidley: Well, Anne wrote a book called “Living in Process.”

Donna Ferris: So, just read that one.

Pete Sidley: I love that book. It's kind of meant to be read over time. You know, it's like, I read it through the first [00:22:00] time, and then, you know, slowly, I'll pick up a chapter here or there, a part of it.

And I think that's a great book, but again, “When Society Becomes An Addict” is so timely right now, so it's hard to say. Of course, I'm very biased. I think Ann is the greatest, and I love her writing. I think they're all good, but maybe “Living in Process” is the one I'd recommend.

Donna Ferris: It'd be a starting point. Thank you so much for your time and for your work. It seems very, very helpful to so many, and I really appreciate your time.

Pete Sidley: Thank you, Donna. Thanks for having me, and good luck with your projects, too.

Donna Ferris: Thank you so much.

That's all for today. If you want to learn more about Pete Sidley and Living in Process, those links will be in the episode notes. Thank you so much for listening. I hope this episode was helpful.

If it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends and family. That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit. And if my daughters, Sienna and Sylvie, are [00:23:00] listening, I want you to know how proud I am of you, and I love you so much. Bye now.