

AUTHOR'S GREETING

I know stuff. Not like trivia or tidbits. *Stuff*—as in, objects. Things you can touch. Tangible household goods. Items on an inventory. That's my métier.

If you're still getting acquainted with the role of a professional organizer, keep going. It's a field that requires a detailed explanation, as many people are unfamiliar with its purpose and scope.

Professional organizers are driven by a genuine desire to help others reclaim their lives and create spaces that nurture their well-being. It is a calling rooted in compassion, understanding, and the belief that everyone deserves to live in an environment that supports their physical, mental, and emotional health.

By providing the tools, support, and guidance through life transitions such as a relocation, renovation, or senior downsizing move—or by simply decluttering one room—we may bring our clients one inch further toward a lasting change.

Many people live with a sense of unease, overwhelmed by clutter, disorganization, and chaos in their physical and mental spaces. They may have accepted their situation

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as the norm, not realizing the toll it takes on their overall quality of life. As a professional organizer, I have the privilege of stepping into their lives, gently introducing the concept of organizing, and showcasing the transformative power it holds.

It is a remarkable journey to guide people who may initially be resistant or unaware of the benefits of professional organizing. By truly seeing and hearing them, I aim to instill hope, restore dignity, and guide them toward a brighter and more fulfilling future.

The reward comes when clients experience a critical shift in their perspective. They begin to see the connection between their external environment and internal discord. As the weight of clutter lifts, they gain a newfound sense of clarity, freedom, and peace. They realize the desperation they had felt deep inside, and the transformation can become a catalyst for positive change in various aspects of their lives.

The topic of organizing gained significant attention in the early 2010s, largely due to the popular TV show *Hoarders*. While this program brought the concept of decluttering and organizing into the spotlight, it also spawned a wave of lesser-known reality TV personalities looking for fleeting moments of fame. Extreme organizing became the prime focus. Over the years, I've consciously chosen not to participate as a guest organizer-therapist in such ventures.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, hoarding is a disorder that is often associated

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with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and even depression. It may also be associated with Prader-Willi syndrome (a genetic disorder), psychosis, or dementia.

What I find problematic—actually, unacceptable—about hoarding shows is their attempt to condense complex interventions, counseling, treatment, and the journey to recovery into brief, entertainment-driven episodes.

While these shows may be captivating and even addictive to watch, their methods are often oversimplified and can be counterproductive. Instead of providing genuine help and support to individuals with hoarding disorders, these shows exploit their struggles and hinder their path towards physical and mental well-being. The language and terminology used in the context of hoarding can also be vague and ever-changing. Thankfully, the understanding of organizing as a tool for promoting health and wellness is steadily growing.

Individuals who hoard compulsively are attempting to fill profound voids within their psyche. It is crucial to make them feel seen and heard, recognizing the underlying emotional complexities driving their behaviors. My approach as an organizer may differ from others; there are no tricks or secrets to my technique. From the beginning to the final stages of an organizing project, I approach my clients and their families with unwavering patience, genuine compassion, and utmost respect.

I take the time to listen attentively and create a space where clients feel comfortable opening up about their

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struggles, fears, and vulnerabilities. By fostering a non-judgmental environment, I encourage honest and transparent conversations that delve into the emotional aspects of their hoarding tendencies.

Rather than imposing rigid rules or attempting quick fixes, I collaborate closely with clients to develop personalized strategies that honor their unique experiences and needs. This method involves a gradual and sensitive approach, allowing individuals to navigate their journey at their own pace while offering guidance and support at every step.

My team and I remain steadfast companions throughout the organizing process, providing reassurance and understanding during moments of resistance. I strive to create a sense of trust and safety, empowering clients to confront the underlying issues contributing to their hoarding behaviors.

We work towards healing and transformation by addressing the psychological and emotional aspects alongside the physical clutter. It is about clearing spaces and helping individuals reclaim control over their lives, build healthier coping mechanisms, and cultivate a sense of cohesion.

I can guide them toward a more balanced and harmonious existence by recognizing and honoring their individual stories. My ultimate goal is to empower clients to create spaces that reflect their true selves.

Some may jest about my role as the “Organizer to the Stars.” Yes, I’ve had the privilege of working with a few

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famous faces over the years. But in my eyes, they are no different from anyone else. Their possessions, like ours, carry meaning and hold particular sway over their emotions. We are all modern-day consumers, susceptible to collections that grow beyond our control.

Comparisons to Marie Kondo are inevitable. I want to go ahead and address that. I hold her in high regard. I've read her books and applaud her for starting a serious conversation about organizing, decluttering, and downsizing. Even so, I hope this book offers another perspective on the art form. I do it differently. I have trouble putting it into words, but I like the Scandinavian concept of *Döstädning* ("death cleaning"). I don't believe in throwing things away. That's not what I do. I believe in repurposing.

Cue the "pig story." Everyone on the Seriatim team knows about the famous pig since he exemplifies that one person's trash—or donation—is another's treasured possession. He's a bronze statue that belonged to a sweet old couple with a pied-à-terre on Manhattan's Upper East Side. They loved being New Yorkers but were getting too wobbly to walk around the neighborhood, and the taxi bills were piling up. So they decided to move near their kids and grandkids in Connecticut.

It was a fairly typical situation, nothing out of the ordinary. The wife was very particular with me during the sorting and prep process: her family's objects were valuable and had to be sold. She had carved mahogany Chippendale furniture, hand-woven carpets, Asian urns and vases—those kinds of things. Her appraisals were

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three decades old, but she was confident her items would garner a high price at auction. They didn't. She nearly gave her most valuable object to the donation facility: a little bronze piglet that had been sitting on her husband's desk as a paperweight.

They considered it a worthless trinket. When I picked it up, I turned it over and looked at the bottom to find an artist's signature. I refused to donate it and waited to show it to the appraiser, who agreed it should go to auction. There, it fetched over \$30k. To quote E.B. White, it was "some pig."

I like to examine the broader issue of life transitions. We're all in a state of transition. Whether it's a new baby, the death of a parent, a high school or college graduation, a job transfer, or a home renovation, you're going through something *at this precise moment*.

Chances are you want to avoid talking about it or feeling your way through it. Most of my clients call me because they don't know where to begin. Trust me, that's the hardest part.

Picture your dream place—your ideal spot on earth, your perfect little room or nook. Which objects do you see going with you? When making those decisions and taking action, I'm your lady.

I cannot help you avoid the pain of learning the lessons that accompany life transitions. I've learned many lessons the hard way, but they have made me wiser, more thoughtful, and more kindhearted.

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Rather than fearing chaos, I see it as an opportunity for growth and exploration. It challenges us to think outside the box, adapt to unexpected circumstances, and find beauty amid disorder. By embracing a little chaos, we can discover hidden potential, break free from rigidity, and invite a sense of adventure into our lives. It reminds us that perfection is not always necessary and that exceptional journeys frequently start on unpredictable and unexplored terrain.