



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 055 –Simplifying as a Wellness Practice with Jill Yesko
July 18, 2021

00:05

Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello and welcome to Episode 55. Thanks so much for joining me.

Take a moment and think about your environment. Your home, your workplace or your car. Do these places bring you a sense of peace or unease? Are they streamlined or overflowing with clutter? Are there boxes and bins that haven't been open since the last move or clothes you haven't worn in years?

Our guest today, Jill Yesko, helps her clients work through all of these scenarios and more. She has experience in social work and human resources management, but left those careers behind to start her company, Discover Organizing, 18 years ago.

While her expertise is as a Certified Professional Organizer, she's a savvy entrepreneur, speaker, and as of this recording, an author. As you'll soon hear, she's skilled in balancing empathy with productivity, supporting her clients while getting the job done.



We cover a range of topics including:

- The types of clutter and root causes;
- The tipping point that moves people to work with a professional organizer;
- How to work through clutter overwhelm and avoid backsliding once progress is made; and
- Actionable steps for listeners to tackle problem areas, including digital clutter.

We end this episode with our Dose of Inspiration segment where Jill shares some of the things that are lighting her up these days. And as always, I'll put links to those items, Jill's website and her new book, *I'm right Here: 10 Ways to Get Help for Hoarding and Chronic Disorganization*, in the show notes.

And here's the surprise - so much of the conversation revolved around emotion: to possessions, to habits, and to change. The process of simplifying is very much a wellness practice.

And now on to the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

02:49 Kathy

Jill, welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast. Thanks so much for being here.

02:53 Jill

Thank you for having me. I'm so excited. I've been looking forward to this!

02:57 Kathy

Same here, same here. Please share a bit about who you are and what you do.



03:04 Jill

Well, my name is Jill Yesko and I'm a professional organizer. My company is Discover Organizing and we are kind of a large firm for what we do. We have 15 employees, which is kind of a larger scale operation than most professional organizers. And I did that so that we could treat a variety of issues that pop up, and residential organizing scenarios, such as photo and memorabilia organizing, and of course, transitioning our lovely senior population. And my background is human resources and social work.

03:45 Kathy

Wonderful. And I think I saw on LinkedIn, you just published a book?

03:51 Jill

I did! Just freshly dropped. Its name is: *I'm Right Here: 10 Ways to Get Help for Hoarding and Chronic Disorganization*. And it explores different methods and ways that can be combined or used by themselves to help guide someone to the right resources.

04:12 Kathy

That's excellent. And congratulations on that. I know what a feat that is and how good that feels. So congrats.

Jill

Thank you. Thank you so much.

04:27 Kathy

So let's start with a high-level overview. Talk a little bit about the different types of clutter and some of the root causes.



Jill

Well, you know, clutter used to just be, in my opinion, clothing spilling out of a closet. People would get overwhelmed with piles of paper. And while those two main reasons to call us still exist, you know, an overflowing closet and a dining room that isn't really used for dining anymore, those two reasons still exist. But the new reasons that I'm hearing are going beyond that situational issue.

There's a really big difference between a situational clutter or a sense of disorganization and chronic disorganization. And they both have very hopeful endings, you know, in my opinion. It's just the journey to get to a sense of peace and daily organization and just having that sense of control over your environment and your time again, it's very possible, but they're very different pathways.

So situational disorganization is when there's a baby being born and all your schedules are all mixed up, when there's a death in the family. Or you're caregiving and now you're taking care of an older adult, maybe a parent, a grandparent. People that are in a situation, such as a baby, a divorce, a death of a loved one, that's very different than the subconscious decision that we sometimes make to create an environment that's less than healthy and organized for us - and that's a chronic disorganized home. And this is probably more obvious and can be confused with hoarding.

So I just want to be careful here that just because someone has a lot of stuff, or they have a more piled high kitchen than we do, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're exhibiting hoarding behaviors. Chronically disorganized individuals usually are okay with being confronted with new ways to get organized and are able to part with items that don't have any value to them anymore.



Once they work with a professional organizer, and hopefully in a collaborative therapy type setting, where there's a therapist guiding the practice of the professional organizer, like that is, to me, such a wonderful situation when the three of us can all talk about a great solution. And the person that's in the field, that professional organizer, can actually use all of the wisdom of the therapist and the training of the therapist to guide the actual activity in the home. So that's what we're hoping to do as professional organizers when we get into collaborative therapy.

But chronic disorganization is something that is what I describe as this drowning sensation for many people. When we get that call, it's very different than, you know, I'm getting ready to move from a six bedroom home to a two bedroom home that I've, you know, I've lived in this six bedroom home for 50 years. And so that's, that's obviously a different phone call because that's someone who's making a plan.

Someone that is experiencing chronic disorganization typically is operating without a plan. Therefore, you know, a professional organizer, an organizer, coach, somebody that's trained to come in and really drive that accountability, but also drive the plan, create the plan and be a partner in the plan, is really important when it comes to chronic disorganization.

08:24 Kathy

I had no idea of the depth and the complexity of some of these situations and I never heard therapy packaged as a, you know, like this three pronged solution. So I think that's fascinating. And I love how you speak to it as a journey with a hopeful outcome. There is some light at the end of the tunnel and you're there to help facilitate that, which I think is really, not only a wonderful selling point, but that's really what people are buying, right, that helpful outcome.



It seems whenever people work through change management of any sort that there's this tipping point, right? We go from this place of status quo, you know, especially in these chronic cases, it sounds like it begins to hurt more than actually taking those first steps and learning how to change. So what is it that moves people to want to work through their clutter and call somebody like you to help them through it?

09:23 Jill

That is a really good question. You know, I've been answering my phone now for 18 years and what I hear is this pain - there's this definite sadness. There's been many times I've said, "It's okay, it's okay to cry with me. It's alright, I know you just met me on the phone, but let it out. Because this is Step One, Day One, and I have a solution for you. I'm going to help you."

And so that pain that we're talking about, you know, that tipping point, what drove them to pick up the phone. The risk for them of living that way is no longer tenable. So, that would be described in a real world situation as an argument with a spouse where the spouse says, "I am no longer tolerating this way of life with you. If you don't, quote, clean up your act, unquote, I'm going to go or you're going to go, something's going to go. I can't be with you anymore." So losing a relationship or damaging a relationship further, you know.

In a situation where there's way too much stuff in a home making it unlivable, then we get into, "I'm being evicted, I won't be able to keep my home anymore and I'm afraid."

And then the other part is a physical injury has made them see that they are building sort of a nest around them. And maybe a disability or an injury or surgery or something



that has caused them to sit still or not be able to move as much, they realize that they are now surrounded by obstacles and they don't have egress to get out of the house.

And sometimes it's actually damage to the home itself. You know, there's so much stuff that, honestly this has happened before, it's fallen in, or because they couldn't get to an area, there was mold and mildew and now they can't breathe in the home.

So there's those environmental risks and factors, there's those emotional risks and factors, like we talked about first, and then there's all this stuff in between. And some of them aren't really visible unless somebody else points that out. And so sometimes the reason we get the call is that there's a sister that's visiting and the sister is calling and saying, "You have to help my sister, you have to help my friend." And that's, that's an entirely different approach at that point, we have to get buy in and such.

12:08 Kathy

So when you started this 18 years ago, did you have any idea you were going to be part psychologist and all of these other things?

12:17 Jill

Um, you know what, I think I did. And I'll tell you why is because I used to be a case manager. And what I loved the most in case management was kind of not only solving the problems, I love solving problems, but I was also finding resources in the community all the time. And I wouldn't stop until my clients were hooked up with the right resources - that was hugely important to me.

And professional organizers all over the world, not just the United States, but all over the world that I've interacted with and networked with, you know, virtually and then at



conferences through the years, they derive so much pleasure out of connecting that person to the right help even if it isn't them.

So even finding someone that can come over once a week and help with, you know, sorting mail or getting them stuff at the grocery store or just doing little things that, you know, online bill pay, handling all the medical and insurance paperwork. If I can find them somebody that can come out and do that regularly, maybe that's not me. Maybe it was, but it's, it's just so satisfying to do that.

So I guess I didn't know I'd be kind of working my muscle on the, as you call this, psychological side, but it does, by default, become a very therapeutic experience. Because the clients will always say, "I feel so much better now that you're here." Or when I'm leaving, they say, "Wow, I was so anxious before you got here and now I feel better because you're not making me get rid of things. You're not making me feel ashamed of my home or the way I live. And I feel better and I can't wait to see you again."

And those are all things, in some way, shape or form, that my team and I hear. And it's very gratifying to know that just in two hours you can help someone to really fully exhale all of that negativity that they've been bottling up and shame and guilt and frustration. It feels really good. So that tipping point is usually pain and if we can alleviate that pain, you know, that's a goal for us for sure.

14:46 Kathy

Yeah. And it also seems like the breath of relief comes from this feeling of empowerment that they get to choose how they want to take this journey, which I think is incredibly powerful.



So if you're just meeting a client as you've described and they're completely overwhelmed by the depth and the breadth, how do you get that progress in those first few hours? I know the problem isn't solved there, but what are some of those first steps that you take with somebody that they may have been living with this situation for 10 or 20 years before you walk in? "I don't even know where to start," is what they're thinking. What are some of your first steps?

15:26 Jill

Well, managing expectations is always huge. And I try to do that on the phone first so that they know I don't have a magic wand, as much as I wish I did. That as soon as I walk in, I'll be like, "Your kitchen is perfect." You know, put my fairy dust all over this place. I can't do that. But I believe me, I want to.

And so we manage those expectations really clearly by talking about, you know, what does organized look like to you? Because everybody listening right now has a different picture in their mind, of, you know, everybody used to use the phrase, "It's not Better Homes and Gardens, right?" We heard that all the time.

We also hear, "Are you going to make into a Martha Stewart?" They're afraid of that extreme other side of what they're experiencing. So I always say, you know, "We're going to create a home that is comfortable *to you* and feels organized *to you*. So tell me what that looks like."

And a professional organizer, when they come in, they always do an initial assessment. It's a best practice for us to come and spend at least an hour with our clients in the environment that we're going to be working in. And I have to tell you, you know, we're not always allowed to go into every space on that first visit. And that's okay with us. We don't



say, “No, we’re gonna need to see all of it, ma’am or sir.” We can just see what you’re willing to show us today.

And so sometimes, that in and of itself, is reassuring in the sense that we’re not going to try to do a whole home makeover. First of all, it’s impossible to do. Even when I was on the Hoarders TV show, they, you know, it’s four days. But if you could see the 20 people behind the scenes making that happen, just for three or four spaces of a large Victorian home that day, it is a lot of work and it’s exhausting to make decisions.

So that’s why I always say, “It’s up to you, it’s up to your decision speed. And I want this home to look the way you want it to look. Because it doesn’t matter what I want here.” So that’s where we start. So that’s the starting foundation of that relationship.

And then we get into the organizing plan itself, which takes all the stuff I’ve seen, all the items that I have now been able to see with my eyes. But then I also take into account all the things I’ve heard my clients say. And I can kind of parse a lot of goals out of what they’re telling me are the problems. And so we take those challenges and we turn them into plans, and then goals, and we put them into smaller bite-sized goals. And then after we’ve written everything down, we’ve gotten everything out, then we prioritize.

So what hurts the most to you right now? And in a typical organizing scenario, even someone that just has a situational organizing challenge, I’ll say, “You know, we’re going to try to clean out your storage areas first, because it’ll give the other stuff someplace to go.” And that is so hard for them sometimes. It’s like, “But I just want to do my kitchen.” And I’m like, “Well, we can, but if you’re open for me to doing the garage first or this big pantry first, then when I do organize your kitchen, I have someplace to put these things that you’ve decided are very valuable to you, are usable to you, are meaningful to you.”



Because once we put something out in a garage or in a basement or an attic, we've kind of said goodbye to it already. And we're just not really quite prepared to let it go or leave our homes yet. And I think if we can prioritize spaces, we have a place to begin and then what we do after that session is over, that original initial organizing assessment, I now can take that information, the prioritized information, and make a really detailed, quality, individualized, customized situation for them.

So that when I come back again, we have something that we can both look at together and say, "Are you still good with this?" And that's all, again, part of managing that expectation. Part of saying, "You know, this is what we agreed to do. Are you still good with this plan because I'd like to get started in the bedroom or the closet or your desk or the dining room area because that's what you said was important. Is that still important?"

And so communication is really critical for us to make sure that everybody's on the same page. There's nothing harder and worse, in my opinion, than you diving in for three hours with somebody, making great decisions, you feel you're making great progress as an organizer, and at the end, having them say, "Well, I was really hoping we get to my office." And that's awful, you know, as a young organizer, I just remember being so proud of what we did. And it was not at all what she was hoping to get done. So I've learned a lot in 18 years.

20:40 Kathy

I bet and I would think that over time you've gotten more comfortable with the flexibility of the plan. Because, I'm guessing, as you said, you sit down with them first to try to ease this overwhelm by saying, "Well, what does organized look like for you?" And I'm



guessing that maybe some of your clients don't even know what that is, right? And that's something that evolves.

21:01 Jill

Yeah. Once they start seeing - I call it the commercial - once they live with a more simple environment, or an environment that's now functioning and flowing well, that's the commercial that they've now seen, day in and day out, and they want that product, or that feeling to happen somewhere else.

And now they're starting to learn what organized feels like - they're not late for lunch with their friend anymore, or to the movies, right? There's a feeling like, "Oh, my gosh, I have all my bills scheduled to be paid out on this day. And I'm happy." And being organized is definitely a feeling of, you know, this contentment and empowerment, and it encourages you. And it sort of continues to motivate. It's a gift that keeps on giving because you feel like you're on top of the world when you show up ten minutes early for something and you're organized in your thoughts, and you're not racing around.

And there's reasons why people aren't organized, other than their situation that they're in. They may have brain-based challenges, like ADHD. That's certainly a huge roadblock for many people that maybe aren't even realizing that this is something they're dealing with. So we have to, as professional organizers, really ask clarifying questions like, "Are you dealing with any brain based challenges? Are you seeing a therapist?"

See, we are allowed to ask those questions because it's only going to help give them the tools and the skills that they're going to need once we're gone, because we were not supposed to be there for life, although there are clients that we will see every week, as long as we're keeping that feeling of drowning that I talked about earlier.



I told Sandy, actually, she's one of our professional organizers. I saw her today and she said, "You know, I feel like I'm just keeping their head above water." And I'm like, "You are. And that's enough. Like, that is okay. And that's enough." And, you know, she felt like, it's always that feeling of, "I should be doing more for my clients." And I'm like, "Believe me, they're not complaining, they're very happy that you're keeping their lives under control with them as a partner." And that's that chronic disorganization piece that I talked about earlier, very different than us going out and making over, you know, a garage to be easily managed for the next 10 years. Right? So, yeah.

23:41 Kathy

It's fascinating how emotion keeps coming up over and over – to the habit, whether the habit falling by the wayside, or getting that habit back in shape and form. Also the emotion to things, not being able to let them go, of thinking the thing is the memory rather than the memory itself.

And so it's almost like this is a wellness practice, it's very much the same thing in wellness, right? Whether you're trying to lose weight, or you're trying to exercise or do something, as you know, implement a spiritual practice. The same kinds of things that you kind of work through, which I think is just fascinating.

24:16 Jill

And it does come down to habits, like you said, it does, it really, truly does. And so you're absolutely right, if there can be just a tiny percentage change. Like James Clear talks about in his book, *Atomic Habits*, right? We're all in love with this book because with these tiny changes, you know, and accountability on top of that you can see some huge shifts in your life.



24:40 Kathy

Absolutely. You mentioned something before on storage, saying that if something has been relegated to the attic or the garage, the decision has pretty much been made, it just has been delayed. And I just wonder what your thoughts are on storage. And that actually was my question, does it delay decision or does it give somebody, in certain situations, some space, the delay in helping that process if you can put it here for now and let's see what your space looks like. How do you think about storage spaces?

25:16 Jill

So the answer to that question is, it serves both purposes. So, yes, it can be a form of avoidance. But avoidance isn't always a bad thing. Avoidance can serve us well, frankly, in times of indecision, and sometimes just removing an object from sight is a very good tool and a good practice.

When I first started out as an organizer, I was anti-storage. I said, "Oh, no, this is just this is really just postponing, and allowing them to bring, you know, my clients to bring in more stuff into the house. And if I clear space, you know, it's like a vacuum, you know, we're gonna fill it."

And then I thought, "Well, maybe I could get it out of sight, but not out of mind." And the way I did that was, I take a really good inventory of what's going into storage. And I curate that and care for it, like I'm moving it to a basement. So because it's off site, you know, I give it an expiration date.

So the lease on the storage unit, let's say, is 12 months. So in six months, after hopefully, I've gotten the home, we've maybe gotten some items out of the home so that we can



work. And let's say I've freed up some space and I want to see how that space is maintained through careful follow-up and maintenance visits and organizing sessions, then I will reintroduce one thing back at a time or a couple of bins or boxes and say, "Now that you know the practice and the workflow of deciding what to keep, toss, sell, or donate, what would you like to do with these things?"

And I try not to do it at the storage site because it's very overwhelming. I try to bring, and this is what I do in people's homes as well, is that I will pick the spot with the least amount of items in it, that they like to spend time in, that they feel good in. And I bring that box to them.

And I'm a big proponent of a crate size, a 12" by 12" decision pile. And if we can get through that, then I'm a big, I'm saying, "Okay, we're going to do the next one."

But people are like, "I'm going to do my basement today, I'm going to do my garage today." And I'm like, "How about we do three feet by six feet today and see how far we get?" Or how about we do this and set a timer, which is another great tool, setting timers, because that lets us understand exactly how long it takes to get through everything from paper to garden tools.

I mean, sometimes, some things are much easier than other things for us. People usually hit the biggest wall when it comes to memorabilia, you know, because then you're really throwing somebody away. If you toss that picture or you get rid of that trophy or you're getting rid of a tie, a pair of shoes, you know? If somebody has passed on, there's even more guilt associated with that.



So that's why professional organizers are so helpful, because we can all relate to what you're going through. We've all lost someone, you know? We've experienced that kind of pain in some level or degree in our lives. So we understand grief and we don't want to push you into doing things you're not ready to do. Anyway, it's not our job.

But getting back to storage. I actually own a storage company, but not what you think, it's not like a storage drive-up place. When I realized that the people I was working with that had chronic disorganization and hoarding tendencies needed the stuff to go away so I could work in that space, but also know it was being harbored safely - I created that safe harbor situation by having an on-demand by the bins storage company.

So they fill the bin and I take the bin and store it and I insure all of that. And they know exactly what left their house. I'm not throwing it away. And now we can work in the dining room. And when you're ready, I'll bring those things back and that's called Homestretch Storage.

And I really love the fact that they trust me to remove it. That's a big step right there. But they trust us to remove it and then reintroduce it because they know we're going to treat it really well. Just like them, you know, we're going to treat the items with respect and take care of them and keep them dry and safe. And then we come back to those items together when we're ready to address them. But they're usually the low hanging fruit, like old tax returns, stuff from a pet that might have passed away. You know, things like that are a little easier for us to remove and then reintroduce. But stuff that's in their active zones we don't touch, we don't remove those things.

30:18 Kathy



Wow, fascinating. So assuming that you've made great progress with a particular client and you're about to say, "Okay, we're done here," how do you help them stop backsliding? Is there some way to or some early warning signals that you help them with?

30:39 Jill

Well, it's funny because you said a phrase that, in this last part, we were talking about, that "for now, we'll just put this here for now." That phrase, and "miscellaneous" are two little words I listen to. When I see things being put into a "miscellaneous pile," or I'm going to put this "over here for now," or I'll look at that "later." Later is also a word that I listen for because then I'm seeing some procrastination.

And procrastination isn't always bad. Just like avoidance. It isn't always bad to procrastinate. But we've got to be looking into our reasons why we might be procrastinating. And if it's, you know, because we're trying to avoid emotional, there's that word again, emotional impacts of your stuff and the layers of feelings that are within that object that you might have to touch become sort of signals for me.

When I'm in the space with our client and go, "Wait, this needs to be addressed." It can't be addressed by me clinically. But I can, you know, say, "This is something I'm noticing. That whenever we get to this type of category, there's some avoidance or maybe just not willingness to address those items."

So we can at least say, "Maybe we will put those things aside, we will contain them, we'll label them, we will date them, and then we'll get to some of the easier stuff." So that's kind of step one for maintenance is really knowing that when they hit those areas, it's



okay to put those things in that container. And that will free them up to, when I'm not there, to work with the other things that are kind of in their path or in their sights.

To keep things going after I've left, we always schedule maintenance visits. So we don't say, "Great, we did a great job in your dining room, we'll see you, good luck. You did a great job making decisions today." Because, you know, chances are, we didn't build a new habit, we just built a technique. And there's a big difference between a technique and a habit.

And you can practice over and over again a technique and make it a habit. But one day for six hours does not make a routine. It just kind of makes an experience where you learn something new about where you can take things to shred in your area. Or maybe you learned about, I don't know, photos and metadata, and you're like, oh, cool, I can find this out, I can put my photos in this. That's great.

But in the end, you know, there's a technique called body doubling that we use in the photo organizing industry. In the therapy world, it might be called parallel play for children where there's similar activities going on, but the person is with you. So that builds accountability as well. And I frequently use body doubling on stuff that I really struggle with making decisions about or if I'm having trouble attending to something.

So if it can't be you, because of maybe financial reasons that that person can't have you back every week for two or three hours, they can usually try to find somebody that can body double with them, that can be in the space that builds that accountability. And you can provide, as a professional organizer, you can provide that client with a written plan and say, "Here's what we've decided. This is our workflow for keeping your



kitchen organized, or this is our workflow for keeping your garage from piling up all this stuff again. So here's your checklist of your processes for opening and managing email.”

So all that stuff we provide. And we can come back and work regularly with you until you feel like you can knock off the training wheels. Or you can have someone you trust who is non-judgmental come in and be in the home at the same time with you. And it doesn't mean that that person is sitting next to you like a shadow or sitting on your shoulder. But that person's presence drives that accountability to finish whatever it is that you were doing, or to create that sense of sustainability on that habit.

35:02 Kathy

Really smart, very smart. And finally, I wanted to end with, thinking about our listeners, so maybe not in the chronic or even the situational state, but we all have our spots, right?

Jill

Sure.

Kathy

And speaking from my own experience, the place that I sold six years ago, I basically took my attic from my old place and put it in a storage room in my new place. I don't see it, I don't walk by it, it's incredibly organized. But nevertheless, this is old lives in boxes. And so if people have an area in their home like that - the garage, an attic, a storage room - what might be the best way to start to create a plan to be able to start to systematically work through that?

35:47 Jill



Well, okay, so what you've kind of just basically described to me are your archives, right, or just, you know, it's like your history. And I guess if there are two, there's probably two categories within those archives. One is probably memorabilia or photos. And the other one is things, are just things like your mom's china, a little tiny thing that your grandfather made that you're not going to display because it just doesn't go with your decor, but it was his, he made this for you. So, kind of dismantling that kind of stuff is what we do.

And especially in the downsizing space, what we try to do is for the physical stuff, we start there because that's a little easier. And we actually photograph those things. And we tell stories about those things. And we get those conversations started.

And what we try to do is make a photo album of all of those things, because that way we're memorializing the object, treating it with respect and honoring it, but also possibly saying goodbye if there is no space. If there is space, absolutely no problem, store it, keep it safe. If you really care about it that much, make sure it's in a container, make sure it's, maybe if it's too big, then make sure there's something over it, like a sheet or something to keep dust off of it or whatever it is you have to do. If you really want to keep it, then make sure that you're protecting it.

And also, I like to do a home inventory. So it's really important to me, like I said earlier, if we're going to take stuff over to storage, or if you're going to keep it in a storage area, the practice of actually writing everything down that's inside that closet or garage is cathartic because it may open your eyes to say, "I really don't need this, I just sort of wanted it in my home." And you get to start thinking about it. And it doesn't mean that we're going to take it out that day and drop it off a Good Will. It just means we've now



made you aware of what might be in the sort of Pandora's Box situation of that storage room.

And taking that home inventory of the storage room will create this awareness and possible action. And when we've done this before, when we've gone in to do a home inventory, I find it very fascinating because 70% of the stuff that they thought we were just inventorying, ends up leaving these archive areas, not in their, you know, home living space, I mean, when we're doing a home living space and we're cataloging the art and the big electronics and things like that and jewelry that's active.

But then like, well, we do have this room in the basement. And then we find slides, we find albums, we find framed pictures that they took off walls years ago. So now we can make an action step on the memorabilia side of things by making a digitization plan, a storage plan. So that, you know, there's a reason why somebody took that photo, there's a story there.

So let's tell that story. And a lot of people don't have time to tell the story. But yet, when there's a fire or a flood or there's another type of disaster, or the person has to leave their home for any reason, a hospitalization or whatever, it is the number one thing that they miss.

So it's interesting for us as organizers to see the things that mean the most to people kind of shoved away, you know, a photo or a little object, a piece of something that means so much to their family history or their personal history. And we have to kind of bring those things up and out to be dealt with. We kind of shine the light on those uncomfortable situations at times. But we also can find a solution for those things as well.



And so what we do at Discover Organizing is we are big into photographing and telling a story, even if it's just a big old picture book of possessions, if that's as far as we can go while we're taking things over to an auction house or to a donation center. At least we're taking that photo and asking the person about the story and we will create the storybook for you, if you want, if it means you're going to have more space, we'll take care of that with you or for you, whatever you choose. So that's one way of doing it. But it seems to be the most effective way that I have found is if we tell the story, we honor the item.

40:18 Kathy

It's interesting that you said a word there about awareness that I think is really key. Once you start realizing what's down there, it's always the trepidation of opening those boxes and then once you kind of get in there, it's just like, "Okay, why was this such an issue for so long, right?"

40:36 Jill

Yeah, I mean, with anything, you just have to start and as you said, tipping point. You know, sometimes it is a negative situation, like a, you know, horrible rainstorm. It makes you run down and grab those cardboard boxes and go, "Oh, my God, why did I have this in cardboard?" So you're running down to rescue these items and take them to safety.

And then it's, "Why did I wait so long?" I could have shared this with my brother, I have shared this with my aunt, this was a picture of her as a little girl, I don't know why I have this, but I have it. And now you're going down that rabbit hole of, again, shame and guilt for not honoring a memory or a possession or whatever it is.



So just begin to start handling those things. You know, touch is a huge, huge gateway, that sensation of touching something. And often, if I know I'm having someone deal with a grief situation, I will hold the object up and they can look at it, but I won't hand it to them. Because as soon as they hold it and they smell it. And they, you know, then they hold it to themselves, they become attached to it once more.

So sometimes I'll hold up something and say, "Do you still like this dress?" Or "Do you still like this frame? It doesn't have a picture in it?" "Oh, no." But if I handed it to them, it's a whole different story. It brings everything back.

42:01 Kathy

Interesting. So one last question before we wrap up and that is - twenty years ago when you started, digital clutter wasn't that much of an issue. So just a few thoughts on how we can keep our digital environment streamlined.

42:18 Jill

That's great, that's a great question because, you know, like clutter itself, like we think about clutter as just possessions that we don't really care about anymore and just unused things, but you can't see the things that are buried in your computer, you can't see the things, those little memory sticks, you know, that you have and flash drives and SD cards for photos. You know, a big, big filing cabinet we can see.

And in fact, there's cultural issues, too, about the way we're raised, about how we treat everything. So you have all this stuff where you're told as a child, you know, "This is very special, hold this very close to you."



And now in the digital world, you can't even see it anymore. So then it becomes the unknown scary stuff that you have to go find. And so what I typically say, just like I do with people's photos when I do a photo assessment, I'll do the same thing with your digital collection. I say, "I need to see everything." And they're like, "Everything?" I say, "Everything."

That means, let me see your, you know, all the little flash drives. Let me see any CDs or DVDs you have. Let's just gather everything, even an old laptop, let's go grab that, let's just see what we have - take that inventory.

And then, the same thing, the same exact principles apply. We might have two laptops stacked up, some tablets with some photos on them or documents or very important financial records that are just buried and mixed in among the papers and the like. That's okay. Just seeing it all helps you figure out that plan, the prioritization aspect of what's more important to you? "Do you want to get to all the documents first and see what's what? Or do you want to look at photos and videos? Are you worried about risk financially? Do you think there's some stock information or investment information?"

So we have to kind of identify those risks first, and that feeling, you know, try again, mitigating anxiety, that's always that's always very important to us. So we can do that with the digital realm. Like teach them how to manage emails, you know, putting emails by decade if you have to, or by year, into a folder, you can go back to 2014 when you're ready, you can go back to 2018 when you're ready, but let's just work with 2021 because that is fresh.

So we'll do techniques like that. And just trying to contain, much like you would do with a physical situation. We try to get like with like and then contain it, label it, set that



expiration date or set a goal date, whatever it is. And then we tackle it together and you make that plan and you make that prioritization. And so if you think about digital stuff the way you think about physical stuff, it makes it a little bit more approachable.

45:20 Kathy

Mmm. Excellent. Very good. Thank you so much. I wanted to wrap-up with a couple of more personal questions, our Dose of Inspiration segment, because our listeners love to hear more about our guests. So what's a favorite wellness practice or recent wellness win you've had?

45:37 Jill

Oh, well, um, I've had a few.

Kathy

Alright!

Jill

I would say, I've been making space every day, which is so hard with such a busy brain, to be mindful. And one of the things I learned about myself recently at a little retreat I went to with my daughter, is that I'm a walking meditator. I do meditation better, and I didn't realize this, but I think better when I'm moving. And so I have begun to incorporate mindful meditation in my yoga, which is also something new I've been doing on a regular basis.

For me to go to a weekly yoga class is, like, unheard of, but I've been making myself go. And I sort of, it's that same thing, I just had to start, right, I just had to do it. I put on my yoga pants, I had to put on something, you know, loose fitting and comfortable. And,



you know, find my yoga mat, dig it up out of the mothballs in the basement, and just begin.

And so for me, you know, our yoga instructor says, “Motion is lotion for the body,” and I have terrible arthritis in my hips. I’m a long distance runner who’s now retired from that. And that was very hard for me to accept that I was going to have to become a biker, a swimmer, a yoga practitioner, instead of a runner, because that was my mental health. That was my moving meditation.

So I think for me, understanding that any movement is good. And while I’m moving, I’m allowed to meditate. I do not have to be in this position of that lotus, of sitting there and making certain breathing sounds. I can meditate and be mindful anywhere I go. And I love that. And I’m doing that every day now because I’ve reframed it.

47:31 Kathy

That’s great. That’s great. What have you read or listened to lately that you enjoyed?

47:37 Jill

Well, I did mention the James Clear book, *Atomic Habits*. So I’ll say something different. Glennon Doyle’s *Untamed* has also been something that inspired me to be more self-accepting and to be proud of who I am, to practice self-love. Huge, huge.

So what James Clear did for me in building habits of healthy eating and nutrition and movement and exercise and creating space for mindfulness, Glennon Doyle, you know, kind of married, got me hooked into that, with more self-love and just being so excited to be here.



I am always looking to be better, but I'm being okay with, you know, being Jill, which was really, really important at 52-years-old. I don't think I had realized that I was as valuable as I am. And I have very high self confidence, which I learned is very different than self-esteem. Because I'm capable, but I didn't really know I was worth, you know, kind of keeping around. So it's a really cool feeling to walk around with now. And I'm very grateful for it.

48:53 Kathy

That's excellent. That's great. And I will put a link in the show notes to that book. That's wonderful. Envision your perfect road trip. Where do you go? What do you do?

49:03 Jill

That's easy. I'm a surfer so I will go up and down the Pacific Coast looking for swells. I will look for storms, look for good waves. I'll look for anywhere I can drop in and just walk on the beach and be a part of that big ocean.

Kathy

That sounds perfect.

Jill

That's exactly what I would do. I'd love to do it in an Airstream. If I had the dollars for an Airstream I would be buying one and my surfboard would be inside.

49:37 Kathy

Alright! "I don't have an Airstream yet."

Jill



"I don't have an Airstream yet."

Kathy

Yet. Correct. What has you feeling inspired these days, what's lighting you up?

49:51 Jill

Hmm. I would say right now, this emerging openness in our young culture and our youth right now. There's this emerging openness to diversity. For a long time, it was just in a, you know, "Women are capable." You know, that was the big push. And I think, you know, women are more than capable and I love being a woman and I love being a woman business owner. And I always think that was great. And there were all these movements around that.

And what I'm liking now is that it's about everybody. And, and it's no matter color, creed, it's not just a statement anymore or an HR manual - people are doing it. And I think that's what's so exciting and invigorating for me, is at my age to know, you know, what it used to be like in the world. And now I get to experience and be energized by all of this openness and kindness and not just this tolerance, right? But this, "Tell me more. Tell me who you are. I want to know, I want to learn about this." And the open mindedness is just exhilarating. And I just, I love that right now.

51:13 Kathy

Here, here. Absolutely. And it's almost like from the younger generation's perspective, it's just a given, like, "What's the big deal?" Like, "Of course," right?

51:23 Jill



"Of course, you're this way." or "Of course, this is how you identify," or "Of course, this is what you're wearing." And it's all, it's all not just okay, because I think saying something's just okay is just so minimizing. But being excited about it and watching them want to know more is just so satisfying. And it makes me so happy.

51:55 Kathy

Yeah, the curiosity, yeah, yeah. What's the best way for our listeners to get in touch and I believe you also have virtual sessions too, right?

52:01 Jill

We do. We do offer virtual organizing. You can go to DiscoverOrganizing.com and you can select what type of service you're interested in on our contact form. And we will take it from there. You just let us know you need to know more and we will direct you to the right department.

52:18 Kathy

Excellent, very capable hands. I thank you so much for this wonderful conversation and really appreciate your time. Thanks so much, Jill.

52:26 Jill

Thank you.

52:28

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.



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Until next time, be well!