



The Athena Wellness Podcast  
Episode 056 – Compassionate Family Planning with Jill Yesko  
July 21, 2021

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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 56. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today I'm joined, once again, by Jill Yesko, professional organizer, entrepreneur, speaker and author. In our previous conversation in Episode 55, we touched upon the impact of downsizing on families. And today we dive a bit deeper.

We talk about:

- Strategies to help families downsize in times of aging, poor health or lifestyle change;
- Advice for children of aging parents; and
- The importance of listening and witnessing the stories of our elders to ease the grieving process.



I was touched and heartened by this discussion, especially the role of compassion and empathy to help families navigate these difficult lifestyle changes. It's my hope that as you listen, not only will you be inspired to clear your own space, but you'll be mindful as you help those you love. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

Kathy

Once again, I'm joined by professional organizer and founder of Discover Organizing, Inc., Jill Yesko. Welcome back, Jill.

Jill

Thank you. I'm excited to be back.

Kathy

In our last conversation, we talked about some common themes of organization. But you also do some fascinating work with family planning, in particular, strategies for downsizing. Can you share a bit about that important work?

02:15 Jill

Oh, I would love to. I didn't always incorporate downsizing into our organizing practice. We actually just started doing that about 10 years ago. And it was probably some of the most satisfying work I did because the gratitude factor was so high. Because older adults just weren't physically capable of schlepping things from the attic down to the curb for trash or goodwill or whatnot. And they would say, "Wow, you know, that was amazing that you did that." And I was thinking, "Well, I'm such a superhero rock star." But really what I was doing was letting them visually see the outcomes of their decisions without having to be exhausted physically from them.



And people who are physically capable, healthy, strong, you know, that's like a no brainer, but at the same time, they're going to be tired. We're all tired from making decisions mentally. But having that physical downsizing exercise can just be very, very tiring and overwhelming. And it's daunting for many people to realize that, you know, there's the physical aspect of downsizing.

But usually what people say to me is, "I know I have to do this because I don't want my adult children to do this. I don't want them to be faced with what I had to face when my mom passed away or my dad passed away. I don't want to put them through what they should do with the Limoges or the dress that I wore at my wedding, I don't want them to have to make those decisions."

So I think there's that mortality element that enters our brains as we begin to downsize, which is always so hard. And downsizing for me, became about partnering. It became about, "I'm here to help you every step of the way through this journey." Because even if you're deciding to sell your home in six years or in six months, I'm right here to help you do that. So we're going to make a plan, much like a professional organizer comes in and makes an organizing plan, or a senior move manager or a relocation specialist like our team, we also make a plan.

And it has, you know, we're going to do this phase by this time, we're going to do this space by this time. And these are the people that are going to help us do that. And so we'll get vendors involved, like donation centers that pick up. We'll get auction houses that pick up - we like people that pick things up for us, so that it's just done in one day. You know, we put them in one area of the home to be picked up.



Then we can really get into what we're doing with the stuff that's left and will it fit? So then we get into the space planning aspect of that. Where are you thinking about going? Even if we don't know what that looks like yet? How many bedrooms is your new home going to be like? Or do you want to stay here and we'll get you to age in place, as they call it, safely and affordably and comfortably? And we can do that together. So that's kind of nice, a nice thing to do, too, is to stay where you are, but stay with less stuff surrounding you.

05:47 Kathy

Yeah, I think that there's multi levels there. Right? I think the hardest one is when somebody has to move for health reasons to assisted living. And "I'm used to having this house and now I'm going down to a room." And you do that kind of work, too, right?

06:04 Jill

Oh, yeah, we do that, I would say, that's probably 60% of our activity right now, in this season of the year, for sure. Because there's a lot of real estate moving around right now. But I would say taking that four bedroom home and having to kind of dispatch all that stuff with that person. And sometimes with family members, because maybe the person who owned the home has already moved on to an assisted living community, then we're kind of working with a sibling or one of the oldest children, or we're working with a grandchild. And we're making decisions about maybe some things that we should sell versus donate versus send to another family member in Seattle, or wherever it is, you know, we have to kind of help run along, you know, the runway with them to get that stuff where it's supposed to go.

So you know, we're doing that job of the air traffic controller, we're doing the job of the pilot, we're doing all these little jobs. We have to make the plan with them strategically.



“Are we doing this to sell the home? Are you going to be moving into the home once now that this person is not living there anymore?” So there's lots of questions that we have when we develop a nice scope of services that is very customized.

And then we work with that family member or the client themselves. And sometimes we even work with the client, even though they're already living in assisted living. They'll meet us over at the house once a week for four hours. And we'll just go through everything. Or we'll go on Skype or Zoom or FaceTime and bring them into the room with us, set up the room, set up the iPad on a tripod. And they'll be with us virtually and they'll go, “Nope, yep, show me that again. I don't like that. Can you let me see? Let me see that. Oh, Jill, show that to me again.” And we can have a nice virtual organizing session that way or a downsizing session. And they're like, “Oh, could you bring that by the assisted living community so I can have that? That's my sister's, but I love it.” “Okay.” You know, so we can do that kind of stuff.

08:17 Kathy

Mmmhmm. And then the last question for you. In our prior conversation that we had, you talked a bit about witnessing and the role of witnessing some of these stories and listening. Can you just speak a little bit about that process? I was so heartened as my parents have aged and one has since passed - that seems such a crucial way to be able to give the gift of saying that it was important and helping these folks move on.

08:48 Jill

Right. Um, I'll just tell you a very quick story, which points this out. My mom was moving from her home in Annapolis to another home in Shepherdstown, West Virginia was the place she wanted to go. She's there now and she's very happy with her horses and farm.



But we had to get her from a neighborhood in Annapolis to Shepherdstown. And she's a very capable woman, very good at decision-making.

I had helped her, driven down there from Pittsburgh and I helped her pack everything up, label everything, load up, she was going to use the horse trailer – she was not excited about using a truck. So I am a very respectful daughter and I did exactly what she wanted. And I needed something soft to put in the trailer to buffer this lamp against this statue and I didn't want them to rub. So I grabbed the quilt off of the guest bedroom and I rolled it up and I put it in there.

Then this woman, who had seen the entire process being loaded – she liked the way I packed all the china, her fragiles, she was very happy. But when she saw that quilt rolled up and put between the statue and the lamp, she had the equivalent of a meltdown. And I said, "Oh my gosh, no worries." I, you know, I'm a professional, so I know not to overreact to that, even though I was her daughter. So I gently lifted the quilt out, found some old bed pillows and used those instead.

And she said, "You know what that quilt is? I don't think you understand." And I let her just get it all out and be very angry with me. And then I said, "I'm sorry, I misunderstood." And she said, "That was handmade by..." and she told me the name, I've since forgotten. And there was this huge, and for 30 minutes, she told me the story of this quilt *and I listened*. And that is the key.

And you said, "What is the best advice you can give to older adults for their parents who are aging?" And it's just to listen. And be respectful. Because when it comes to your stuff, when it's time for your stuff, isn't that how you want to be heard and treated and not pushed aside because it's a stupid quilt or blanket, right?



It's, it's a story. It's their history. It's a witness to how they lived their life, and what they treasured and what was valuable to them. And for me, it's this, you know, big bunch of cloth and batting and stitches, right? But to her, it was very, very important. And I misunderstood. And I fixed it and I made it right.

Which is the other thing you should do, too. To be open to the fact that you're going to make some mistakes. And you're going to have this, you know, when you go through this process of helping your parents, there's going to be misunderstandings, there's probably going to be some arguments about the darn antique dresser that somebody wanted and you accidentally sold it, you didn't know. There's going to be stuff, okay, that happens.

The most important thing is to be contrite and say, "You know what, let's fix this together. I'm going to do everything I can to not have that happen again." And this is hard and just acknowledging with compassion that this is, you know, one of the last exercises that older people do before they go live in that final place, right? In a home or in an assisted living community or even a 55 plus community. There's that sense of I'm going there because there will be no other place for me to go. And parents are having to deal with that on top of the fact that their impatient daughter is standing there looking at her watch and she's got to get home to feed the kids. And "Mom, could you just decide, you know, you don't need all these sweaters. You don't need to..."

Wait, you know. Be listening. Be patient. Be kind. Be respectful. And make sure when you make the mistakes, you correct those mistakes, together as a team.

12:55 Kathy



Such wise counsel, it gave me chills as you were telling that story. Thank you so much, Jill, I really appreciate you being here. Thank you.

13:03 Jill

Thank you.

13:05

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.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!