

## We can change the world

After all of the classes and the networking, after all of the incredible information; that is the simple-and most important- lesson I took away from Reno. It came from Peter Walsh's keynote speech "Visionaries for Change."

Peter's speech was the highlight for me, and not just because I was already a fan. Actually up to this point, I was more, let us say, less than thrilled about his kind of "organizing." I wondered after seeing him on TV if he did not do more harm than good. However, after hearing him speak I understand that he "got" it. And that he will spread the word about what we really do.

His keynote spoke of those in our profession as "visionaries". Is it a vision that "is grander than this, that can change and transform not just people, not just communities, maybe even the world."

"If you focus on the stuff you will never get organized," Walsh said. "You may get stuff into place but you will never get any long-term sustained change. The stuff is a distraction; you need to look beneath the stuff to look at what is really going on. Organization is almost never about the stuff. People buy the product but they invest in the promise. The more can be achieved with the less. When you heal a home you heal something far, far deeper."

"The stuff is a way for the person to tell the story," Walsh added, because, "people want more than just their stuff being put into pretty boxes."

Peter spoke of our clients wanting us to "get" them. This is why our clients pay us; this is what they want, the transforming, "eureka!" moments that let them get on with their lives. He understands that our clients "want their lives back."

My very first client was that kind of epiphany for me. The client was trying to put her house on the market and she needed to get rid of stuff because the realtor told her she needed to—not because she was ready to do so. The stuff had belonged to her partner and her father, both of whom had recently died.

Being a complete novice I spent several hours trying to deal with the "stuff" not realizing that the papers had nothing to do with the clutter. I was trying to guide her with a very realistic, practical approach. Why did she need checks from her partner's closed checking account? The estate was closed, the IRS had what they needed, let's just shred them—I didn't have a clue as to what was really going on. Not until she suggested we build a fire in the fireplace, and I watched as she carefully fed hundreds of checks—box after box— slowly into the fire. Then I got it.

She was saying good-bye to her old life, not just some "stuff," and she trusted me to be by her side as she did it. After that day we were able to quickly and efficiently get the work of clearing the house done. She had made her peace.

I was decluttering the office of a dying business. What I saw was a business come back to life. As we redefined the vision of the office, we were redefining the vision of the business itself.

I teach new organizers, and I try to convey that what we do is not just about containing or thinning out someone's belongings. When clients call us, they are calling for help. Peter talks about how when we are allowed in someone's space, "we are not just touching their stuff, we are touching their pasts. We need to bring clarity and control. Stuff is a key to get in the door; when we touch their stuff we are touching the fabric of their lives. Their stuff has power, we are touching life and death, we are touching mortality, the passage of time, who people are when we touch the stuff. We are messing with the power of the universe. It's not about the stuff; we should be humbled to be invited into that."

"When we change an individual, we change a room, and when we change a room, we change a home, and when we change a home we change a family, and when we change a family we change a community, and when we change a community we change the world," Peter added.

My feelings exactly!

*"We strive to make a better life through organizing the spaces in which we live, work and play."*

