

From the Editor

The Organizer Can Change Your Life

WHAT DO YOU CALL A PERSON WHO comes into your office to talk and is soon realigning the pictures on your walls, recommending ice cubes to revive a dying plant and suggesting you throw out a pen short on ink?

Organizer, I think, would do it ... and in this case the person is Marla Ottenstein, who just happens to be a professional organizer. That means she's paid to neaten up your life. Whether it's a closet or garage, a lifetime of paperwork, a corporate or home office—or, a big job, helping you move smartly from one household to another or downsizing.

And how did Marla, a bundle of energy and resolve, come to this profession (where satisfied clients cry for joy and tell her she's changed their lives forever)? Well, she always had that sense for order, but this native of Washington, D.C.—in the name of challenge and adventure—had first charged through such other careers as buyer for Bloomingdale's in New York, assistant producer for NBC News/*Today Show* (Washington, D.C., bureau) and national sales manager of the “millennium experience” for The Ritz-Carlton, Naples. She was running her own boutique marketing and public relations firm in Naples when the recession hit in 2008 and lots of her high-end client builders, designers and architects couldn't afford her services anymore.

“I remember calling my brother Todd from the airport in Miami around that time and telling him I was going to become an organizer,” Marla says. “He said, ‘Are you nuts? We're in the middle of a recession!’—but both our parents had histories as successful entrepreneurs and I just believed I could do it.” Within three months of her hustling and promoting and working to all hours, the business took off and here she is five and a half years later still going strong.

Gaining entrance to people's lives and possessions is a sacred trust, and it hasn't come without some eye-opening discoveries. Marla respects the privacy of her clients, but, without naming names, has stories. “One woman,” Marla recalls, “called to say she was being evicted for no apparent reason and could I help her move the next day. And, by the way, did I like animals? Dogs, cats, birds, rats and don't forget the four Komodo dragon lizards, although one was missing. There were 17 total. When I asked about snakes, she told me she had to get rid of the snake because it bit her.”



STEFAN ANDREEV

Then there was the client with 12 brand-new food processors—who didn't cook. The old shoebox in someone's garage filled with \$800 in \$1s, \$5s and \$10s. The woman sorting through her deceased father's possessions and discovering his sex-after-90 instructional videos. The woman so into shredding her office papers that Marla barely caught her before she destroyed a \$4,300 real estate commission check.

But Marla presses on. “I'm never judgmental and always compassionate. My job is to simplify people's lives, give them systems and thus more time to pursue all

the other things they love to do. I always have to stay calm, especially when dealing with the emotions involved with life-altering changes like divorce, death, moving, unemployment and downsizing. And, by the way, there seems to be a lot more downsizing lately. I really feel I make a difference in my clients' lives, and I leave their homes and offices every day with a smile.” Marla also does lectures, with regular sessions, for example, at Florida Gulf Coast University's Renaissance Academy. Toss in her work for several local charities and her busy tennis schedule and you could say that Marla is a walking/running model of the efficiency she preaches.

I asked if she has any tips to help us all bring more order to our lives. “Make your bed every day,” she says. “You create order in at least one part of your life the moment you wake up. If you purchase anything, be it a dress, slacks, shoes, decorative pillows, pots, pans, you really need to get rid of one ‘like’ item. Think of it this way: If you were to buy a new mattress and box springs, would you save the old ones?”

Phew. We know you're right about all this, Marla, but it takes some work. I've kept my office pictures in perfect alignment now and have dispatched all non-working pens. Am still mulling the ice cubes for the plant. Marla? ♣

—David Sandler

CORRECTION

In *Gulfshore Life Health Annual 2014-2015*, we incorrectly reported in a listing of Top Doctors that plastic surgeon Audrey Farahmand is retiring. In fact, Farahmand, 43, has had no plans to retire and is functioning full-time at her practice at 12411 Brantley Commons Court in Fort Myers (239-332-2388). The mistake occurred as we tried to designate a different physician as retiring. We apologize for the error.