

**Veronique Peeters** is a remarkable lady who has been through some serious changes throughout the last 2 years. After a career of more than 30 years in the corporate world, she decided to go for her dream, becoming a professional organizer. Later on, she got health challenges...and had to adapt her life to these new changes. We had the chance to meet her online and had a nice conversation.

***What made you decide to become a business entrepreneur after your 50s?***

Well, I was doing my work for so many years, really having a stable 9-to-5 job doing what I was good at as an office manager. After a while, I didn't feel satisfied nor acknowledged for my work. I felt I had to make a change. Friends told me to think about starting my own company, but in what exactly. I had no clue until my partner told me I was good at organizing. I was a great office manager and in my private life, I was running the household as a manager too. I did some online research and found out that my skill had a name: "professional organizer". I didn't realize I could help other people with this skill. I followed a professional course and combined this new passion with my former job.

***Did combining two jobs work well for you?***

No, not at all, I can't do a little bit of both. I wanted to focus fully on my new activity. It was a challenge/ Although my income as a professional organizer wasn't enough to leave my old job, I did take the plunge and left my corporate job and all the securities I had.

***How did you manage this career change?***

It went well. I chose for myself and it felt liberating. I was finally doing something I liked to do. I could see myself working in my new career for at least the next 15 years.

***When did you start as a professional organizer?***

In 2019 I started full-time and it went well. I had new clients, I prepared my social media posts, and was eager to continue on my business journey.

***What happened a year later?***

Early 2020 I received difficult news: I was diagnosed with breast cancer. So there I was, not able to work for at least 3 months. I didn't want this to happen as I was now working so well as a professio-

nal organizer. My world came crumbling down. Then the lockdown a few weeks later, I noticed that the whole world was crumbling down, so I just let it be and went along with whatever circumstances we were facing.

### **Now a year later, how do you look at those 3 first months?**

As I was not allowed to work, I did keep myself busy in a gentle way. Other professional organizers were going completely online.

I choose purposefully to heal and enjoy life. In that period I was lying in the sun and taking care of myself. But I began to miss my work, my clients, and especially the beautiful results we always achieved, so I gave away 6 free online consultations. The Online Formula became clear to me. Because I noticed that nice results could be achieved also that way, I decided to offer my services online as well.

### **What are the services you provide?**

Now I help to organize the home and/or administration of my clients. Some people go through chaos because of life circumstances, so I assist them in

decluttering and getting an overview of their things and spaces. Afterward, I also put systems into place so they can avoid chaos and clutter in the future. They have better habits and make sure to keep it clean and tidy. For a few months, I have had a Facebook group. A lot of people started to declutter and clean their homes. Although I saw other organizers pushing people into decluttering thinking everyone had too much time on their hands. Well, this wasn't the case for everyone. Some single-parent households had to work from home and take care of a toddler or an elder child. Imagine going to the grocery shop without your kids. Nowhere to drop them off as they weren't allowed to visit their grandparents. This is just one example. I told my followers "do not demand too much from yourself" as this period was very hectic and stressful.

### **So you fully understood the situation many parents went through?**

Yes of course and I got a lot of reactions on my post where I encouraged people to slow down and take care of themselves. Some said "We felt so insecure and incompetent as we couldn't follow" Many other people had plenty of time but some didn't and said, "yes



people have time, but I'm not getting ahead, how silly am I". I was quite satisfied when I wrote this post, so people would become aware they were allowed to slow down.



### ***Did you show quite a lot of empathy towards your followers and clients?***

Yes, I did. I'm really into organizing and having a clean decluttered house but when it is too much, it needs to be said too.

### ***And how did it go for you during the lockdown?***

Well, I was supposed to rest and heal from my cancer treatment. It was a huge challenge as everyone was home. My 2 teenage children had online schooling and my husband worked from home. This was a huge change for me. In "normal" times I would be on my own, doing my own thing and now, they were all at home 24/7 and I was supposed to rest.

### ***Quite difficult then?***

Yes, I had to move my home office to the attic to be able to go back to work in a peaceful way.

### ***How did you go back to work?***

I started over, checking into the needs of my clients. My services were online for a while but I was missing the live contact with my clients. I took my time, as everything had slowed down, not only due to the pandemic also my health made me slow down. I worked at my own pace and started one step at a time.

### ***Did you change in some way since the pandemic and your cancer thriving experience?***

Well, I'm more aware of my limits and skills. I also advise my client "Think about yourself, do something for yourself. Do something that makes you happy". When the sun shines go enjoy yourself in the sun and leave cleaning your kitchen for the day after.

I also advise people who have a health issue to work in little parts, to take their time to clean and declutter. One day at a time. Do one drawer a day, so you see you're moving on but avoid doing too much too quickly.

***We often get attached to so much stuff, we also get emotionally attached. How can you explain this?***

Well, every item has some meaning to the owner. Sometimes it is a gift from a special someone, sometimes it is the memory of a special occasion or life moment. Who has given you this object? Which memory does it recall? Where were you when you received it? Which scent was present? So many factors around one item which made it difficult to get rid of it. When you are an outsider you could say “well it is just a box or just a dress” but for the client, it sometimes has a whole other meaning.

As a professional organizer, I will never tell someone to get rid of something, I just accompany them to think of the importance and necessity of keeping it or not, without forcing anything. I look along and give advice. I organize and assist in prioritizing what is meaningful and useful for my client. The final decision is always with my client.

***What is a successful organizing project?***

When we can find a system that works well for the client, I feel satisfied. One day I had to help with organizing a garage box and some old dishes from

their grandfather were hidden underneath the dust and clutter. As my clients couldn't detach from these dishes, we decided to take them out of the garage and use them in the kitchen.

***What would you do differently than a year ago?***

When I was diagnosed with cancer I wanted to go back to work as soon as possible. Now I would rather take the extra time to heal properly, so I could enjoy my work afterward, fully rested and healed.

***Do you have any advice for people eager to start their organizing journey?***

Give yourself the chance to declutter well so you can enjoy the full space of your home and the calmness in your mind while doing so. I'm all-in for anyone interested in any assistance to make this dream come true.

***Thank you for participating in this interview.***

***Victoria Vandersteen***

