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NICOLE GABAI

A born organizer, this multi-cultured woman helps people downsize and minimize the stress of moving.

BY LAURIE CURTIS
(Pages 38 – 39)

Even as a little girl, Nicole Gabai loved to organize. As a 6-year-old attending a Montessori school in Paris, she took it upon herself to keep the games at school arranged in a systemized manner. Among her favorite pastimes as a child were playing post office and store, keeping track of inventory. Although she pursued a career in television production, she soon found that her organizational skills remained the central key to her success in every position she held.

Born in Lima, Peru to a French-Peruvian father and a mother who had moved to Peru from Miami, Nicole's childhood was rich in international cultural experiences. She lived in Peru until the family moved to Paris when she was 6 years old. A year later, her family moved to Miami, where she grew up and lived until she moved to New York City to attend college.

Nicole is trilingual, fluent in English, Spanish, and French. In fact, English was her third language, one she did not begin to learn until she was 8 and attending school in Miami.

In describing the development of her interests in the arts and organization as a child, Nicole reflected upon the influence of her family. "My dad's side of the family is so artistic. They are all sculptors, painters, and writers. My mom's side of the family is all attorneys and bankers."

She explained how her organizational skills were influenced by her grandfather in Miami, an attorney and a banker, who was able to switch seamlessly back and forth from his law practice to his bank and keep everything in order. "His filing system impressed me. He had meticulous orderly photo albums. He even had a file for me."

It was at her grandfather's bank at the age of 15 where Nicole got her first job. This gave her a first-hand opportunity to learn about every aspect of running a business.

Nicole tried to balance a focus on business with her interest in the arts when she pursued her college education. She initially attended the Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, which offered a Bachelor of business administration program that combined art and business.

However, after deciding that the Parsons program offered too much marketing and business and not enough of the artistic focus that she wanted, Nicole left to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in textile design in 1989.

In her final days at FIT, she took a TV production class as an elective, her first foray into the world of television production. During this class, she produced her first-ever video, a piece on how to tie a sarong. Just from taking this one class, she realized that she loved the world of television production, particularly because it gave her an opportunity to be original, which was a natural fit with her creative side.

Lacking any television production experience but possessing lots of persistence and determination, Nicole landed her first television production job as a marketing assistant in the international department at MTV in New York City. Entering this new and fast-paced world of television production, Nicole was “totally self-taught and always asked lots of questions.”

Her organizational skills quickly came into high demand. She developed a system for MTV to handle the fan letters that were sent to MTV star Daisy Fuentes and set up other organizational systems for the office.

In her limited spare time, she volunteered at the Spanish television network, Telemundo, producing Sunday news segments. In describing her early professional experience in New York, Nicole called the environment “a good training ground, where she learned a lot from demanding but exceptional bosses.”

Nicole ultimately spent 10 years in television and film production between her stints at MTV in New York, Nickelodeon and the Orlando Film Commission in Orlando, Florida, and MacGuffin Films in New York. During her time in the corporate world, she became well-versed in the systems of corporate organization and created new and innovative approaches of her own.

The demands of the world of television production requires that one be able to retrieve information quickly, such as finding the last time a particular actor appeared in a commercial. Nicole became adept at cross-referencing information so that it could be located and recalled immediately.

When she was ready for a career change and a chance to leave behind the frenetic corporate production environment, a friend, who was also a therapist, asked Nicole to organize her office. Starting with this initial client, Nicole’s organizing business expanded through word of mouth. She began organizing offices, home offices, bedrooms, living spaces and closets.

Her business, first called Amano Organizing (“by hand” in Spanish), was later rechristened B. Organized, a name that resonates with the essence of Nicole’s mission. With each client, Nicole seeks to “try to learn how they think and what would be intuitive to them,” so that she can provide them with organizational strategies that coordinate with their lifestyle.

While B. Organized offers a full range of organizing services for homes and offices, since moving to Falmouth, Nicole has discovered a niche of offering moving and relocation services that are specifically geared toward those over 50, realizing that there was a huge need for it.

The central focus of her approach to working with those over 50 and their families is to minimize any relocation stress and “to try to make it as little an adjustment as possible.” Nicole describes working with clients as “such a personal relationship. They bring me into their lives. It is a privilege.”

The task of getting people ready to downsize and move out of their homes is often overwhelming and even traumatic for parents and their adult children. Nicole is often retained by children who live out of state. Nicole seeks to empower people as they go through the difficult experience of being uprooted. As they decide what to do with each piece of furniture, memento, or household item, she allows them to share a trip down memory lane, giving them a chance to reminisce and “relive their life through these stories.” She develops a detailed project survey, a step-by-step plan for each room, goal lists and a project timeline. She stays in close touch with family members, offering project updates, providing regular opportunities for input and managing family dynamics.

While many aspects of working with older people are similar to working with any client, there are unique circumstances that often come into play. Many have accumulated countless possessions over the years and are reluctant to discard items because of a sense of frugality. Nicole brings an abundance of patience to the process, offering suggestions of helpful criteria that clients can use to make decisions about what to keep, what to sell or donate, and what to throw away.

Because of the complex dynamics involved in preparing to downsize, Nicole encourages people to start the organizing process as soon as possible, preferably a year or more in advance of the intended move date. She coordinates the entire moving process, working with a trusted network of professionals, such as furniture and antiques appraisers, dumpster and trash disposal companies, charities that accept donated items, and moving companies that handle the actual physical move.

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One of the most important factors in ensuring that the moving process is smooth, efficient and stress-free is to make sure that every box and piece of furniture is clearly labeled, indicating its contents and its final destination. She manages the move in such a way that the client does not even have to be present on moving day.

Nicole develops a complete inventory list of all items, their location and their final destination. She thrives on ensuring that everything ends up at its final destination and that her clients are well-prepared for the transition that they are making.

One new area into which Nicole has expanded her business is the organizing and cataloguing of clients' antiques and collectibles for the purpose of a piece-by-piece or comprehensive estate sale. "In this economy, people are looking to downsize and find additional sources of income and are considering selling some of their antiques and collectibles. It helps them declutter in an organized fashion and at the same time make some money," said Nicole.

For estate sales, Nicole handles every aspect of the process, from photographing and cataloguing all items that are for sale, to handling all contact with dealers and auction houses.

Her main rule of thumb that she shares with clients for determining whether they should keep or give away, sell or discard a particular item is that they should ask themselves these two questions: "Do you love it?" "Do you need it?" She suggests that individuals get rid of any items that do not meet at least one of these criteria.

While she can recite the charms of the Cape like a native, Nicole only moved to Falmouth three years ago. After being displaced by a fire at her New York apartment building, Nicole jumped on the chance to stay at a client's second home on the Cape for a few weeks.

Once she moved to Falmouth, she "fell in love with the area, the people, and the cultural offerings," and has never looked back. She quickly focused on meeting people and integrating herself into life on the Cape, taking advantage of networking opportunities and encountering new clients along the way.

Nicole has become involved in the community, joining the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce and producing and hosting her own local cable television show on Falmouth Community Television entitled "Area Code 508." It is a half-hour interview and documentary show that features a day in the life of an area resident.

Earlier this year, she presented a free organizational workshop at the Falmouth Public Library, and she has offered classes through the Falmouth Adult Education Program.

As a member of the Falmouth Film Office Task Force, Nicole is working with the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce to set up a local film office. Her goal is to “establish this community as a film-friendly town and create the infrastructure to make this a viable movie production location.”

Nicole is also active in the local arts community, one of her favorite aspects of life on the Cape. Her latest artistic venture is oil painting. “I have explored oil painting since I moved here,” Nicole said. “Oil painting has allowed me to find my creative voice.” She also continues to write television shows.

Nicole still has clients all over the country and loves to travel. No matter where she travels, she is proud to call the Cape home. “I love the combination of everything that is Cape Cod. Living here resonates with me.”

MERRILY LUNSFORD/CAPE COD TIMES

Nicole Gabai of B Organized files some paperwork for a client. She is a former New York television production manager who moved to the Cape with her personal organization business. She specializes in helping empty-nesters move and/or downsize, minimizing upset and stress.

Quickhits

Get organized

B. Organized

Nicole Gabai

508-532-2715

www.b-organized.net

Nicole’s organizational strategies for moving:

1. Start the process as far in advance as possible of the desired moving date. A year or more is best for avoiding rushing and unneeded stress.
2. Don’t work on the project for more than three hours at a time.
3. Break down the process into manageable pieces and multiple phases. Perhaps begin with an obvious “keep” and “toss” pile in each room before moving into the dynamics of which family member has an interest in which particular item. Don’t get bogged down with the magnitude of the project; instead concentrate on taking another step forward in the process.
4. Be realistic about why you are keeping specific items. Make sure that the things that you are retaining are items you will actually use.

About the author

Laurie Curtis lives in Plymouth with her husband, John, where they own her childhood home and are expecting their first child. She loves to spend as much time “over the bridge” as possible. She has a BA in history and English from Palm Beach Atlantic University and a MA in political science from Brown University. She has her own political consulting company and also teaches government courses at Bridgewater State College and Suffolk University. Laurie loves to read, travel, and explore local historical sites.