



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Episode 162:

Come Home to A Space That's Welcoming with Jennifer Burnham

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JR: Jennifer Burnham is my guest today and she's an organizational coach who believes organizing is about more than color-coordinated baskets and pretty labels. Her passion is to help her clients clear space in their home so they can take up all the space in their life. Jennifer lives in North Carolina and in her free time enjoys hiking and yoga; same here. Welcome to the show, Jennifer.

JB: Thank you so much, I'm so excited to be here.

JR: Do you go by Jennifer or Jen or which do you prefer?

JB: I always introduce myself as Jennifer, but it seems that it's always shortened to Jen. (Laughs)

JR: Yeah, right. Well, I'll call you Jennifer so no was confused and I'll be Jen; there we go.

[Laughter]

JB: That sounds good.

JR: Okay. And I know you're starting us off with a motto today, what are you going to share with us?

JB: So gosh, I really had a hard time with this because I have 3 that I love to just kind of speak over and over, but my favorite is, "Slow is better than still and progress is better than perfection."

JR: Oh, I like that because we're always moving, right, yeah. How do you apply that one?

JB: So I obviously am an organization person, I have always been organized. And what I find for myself is I tend to get kind of stuck in the planning phase and the what-if phase, you know, trying to make sure everything is perfect with my business or with a travel plan or anything. And I'll stay where I am versus slowly moving forward because I'm just kind of stuck spinning my wheels. And early on in my career, I realized that if I don't move forward I'm never going to achieve any goals. So even if I'm going slow, and sometimes slow is really painful, I know that eventually I'm going to get there and it's better than staying where I was.

JR: Yeah, perfectionism I always say is very paralyzing, like you said, "Slow is better than still," yeah,

that's great.

JB: And perfectionism is something that's, you know, false, we make that up in our own mind. And it seems so great, "Oh, I'm going to launch this program whenever it's perfect," but it's never going to be perfect. (Laughs)

JR: Yeah, for sure. Well, let's dive into your story of a low point in your life and then we'll go all the way through my interview flow and with how you're still living a vibrant and happy despite any struggles you might face.

JB: Perfect. When I started my business, I was in graduate school and I had a professional development coach asked me, you know, "If the world was perfect and you didn't have to worry about money, what would you do?" and I turned red in the face and I said, "I'm really embarrassed to say this because this cannot be a thing, but I love to organize." And so she encouraged me to really look into it to see if it is a career path that I was going to be interested in able to take, and it was. I mean, I found all these women who were professional organizers and I was just really excited. Well, what I quickly realized is that none of them really hired, at least not in North Carolina, they were mainly just 1 women teams. And so if I was going to do this, I was going to have to make it work all on my own. And I'm not from a line of entrepreneurs or starters so that was really scary.

JR: Mm-hmm.

JB: Who pays my bills? Who pays for my insurance? And I graduated from graduate school and I didn't get a job, I said, "You know what? I'm just going to go hard at this and I'm going to figure this out. So the first couple of months were pretty great, you know, just felt really good. I was at the gym every day, I was writing on a blog; and I'm so glad those things aren't still out there because they're a little embarrassing when I look back and read them. But after about 6 months I realized, you know, I don't have any clients, the bills are coming in pretty quickly, my student loans are about to come due, and I'm a little nervous and scared, I was really scared. So it was July 4th, I went home, my parents didn't live far from where I was, and my tail was kind of between my legs. I just knew that either I was going to have to go get a job, suck it up and feel like a failure or I was going to have to figure this out and sort of pull up my bootstraps. And my parents, I remember watching them back out of the driveway, I was waving, coffee in hand, and I thought, "Okay, can I do this?" My dad is... he'd sort of toes the line on being a hoarder.

JR: (Laughs)

JB: So they have this huge garage (Laughs). And the upstairs in the garage is kind of like a really large attic and it was really full; I mean, you could barely even get around in there. So I walked up the stairs, I flipped on the light, it's 7:30 in the morning, hot as blazes in Charlotte, and I thought, "This is the moment. Do I turn out the light and I go downstairs and I go look for a job or I... do I just try and figure this out? Because if I can organize this space, I can do anything." And 4 days later, I had the entire space organized, and it was just one of those things where I had to put on the blinders and realize that work and action trumps worry all day long. It's so easy to just sit in our worry chair and rock over and over,



but once I got busy sorting and purging and organizing and my parents would come home and I asked him questions, I mean, the week flew by. I had a blast because it is my favorite thing to do, and it's still organized, that was in 2010. So we celebrated with the steak dinner and I went back home and... and I just got busy. I got really strategic with my time to find clients, and little by little, they started to trickle in. But it was a really low point of, you know, "Who am I?" Who was I, thinking that I was going to be able to do this?

JR: Yes! (Laughs)

JB: Yeah! Like, (Laughs) "Who are you?"

JR: Well, I've heard that question so many times when people want to do something brave and different and bold, "Who am I to do this?" So that's so amazing that you made it out the other side of that fear, you kind of took that leap and kept walking when it was dark; so I love that. So let's say you... well, how does that translate into your life now? What does it look like to run an organization business?

JB: Well, organizing, when I first started, I didn't quite understand the link between our stuff and our lives or maybe more of the emotional attachment to things. I've always been organized as a child, I color-coordinated my crayons, I liked systems, I just... I was a naturally organized child; I don't even know what that meant. And whenever I started working with clients, I realized, "Okay, so this all happens in phases, so you have like the sort in the purge phase and then, you know, what's move things around and let's buy some stuff if we need it and then it's organized." Well, the foggiest stage ended up being the sorting and purging. And as we started to move things around and I would ask the questions of, you know, "Is this something that you want to keep? How often do you use it? But it's broken," all those questions, I started to get some really interesting replies. And the emotions and the feelings that came up is really where I... I decided, "This is more of an organization coaching career that I'm interested in. It doesn't really have that much to do with their stuff, but it's a relationship with our things and what it is that we want to experience in our homes and in our lives." We like to compartmentalize our life like it's a big pizza, but it's all connected. And when one area isn't working all that well, it tends to spill over in other areas too.

JR: Mm-hmm. So what are the kinds of situations or emotions or feelings or beliefs, I guess, that would make people start to have too much clutter or that hoarding tendency you mentioned with your dad?

JB: Well, for most of us women, we start out with really good intentions. You know, we're in college, we're living, you know, by ourselves, we might get married, still doing pretty good, keeping track of everything, and then all of a sudden, you're like, "Wait a minute, husband, why... why did you go buy more tools? We don't need more tools." And so the clutter meters aren't aligned with our partners, and then we have children and they come at it with just so much stuff. So it's really adding more people to the household, and then also as a society, we go so fast, we just run at such a feverish pace. We also consume extremely quickly without really asking why. And so the majority of the clients that I work with are 45 to 65, and so they're in this kind of transitional period of either on the verge of being empty nesters or on the verge of retirement. But what I've noticed is between the 30s and the early 40 years is really



where the stuff starts to pile up because life is so busy. There's so many moving parts, the seasons are always changing, and it can be hard to stop and look around and say, "Okay, is this where we're going? It's just kind of hard to get a handle on it." And when I recommend to moms to say, "Okay, well, don't forget, you know, little Johnny is going to all of these practices but he's 7, and who signed him up for all of that stuff?" And they don't really like it when I say that. (Laughs)

JR: Oh, yikes, yeah, for sure. Is there a personality, a type of person who is more likely to accumulate that clutter? Do they have something in common? I mean, can you see patterns? Because I'm not that person. I am... and I don't say this with any level of pride, it's almost I have an obsessive need to throw things out or give away or declutter and minimize. Like it's... my husband sometimes says, "We need more stuff, Jen."

[Laughter]

JR: So obviously, I take it to the opposite extreme, but what do you see common among the people who need help with organization and decluttering?

JB: A lot of times, it's lack of time and finding the time within those early years to catch up. So organization it is extremely simple, there's a place for everything and everything in its place. But the problem starts when things come through the door, and number one, we know where they go but that place is full so we start a pile, or we don't know where it goes so we just put it on the counter. And a small pile turns into a big pile, one corner in the garage turns into the entire garage. So the piles add up, and then now, it's a project. So having the time to tackle that is really where, if you keep up, then it's much easier to say on top of it, but some people have to catch up...

JR: Mm, okay.

JB: ... in order to keep up.

JR: So it's not necessarily a personality thing as much as it is just a habit and keeping up with it.

JB: Completely. We all crave order. The opposite of order is chaos. And I've met some of the most creative people who, some creatives tend to be more okay with stuff around their space and in their home, but they all want it to be organized; no one wants to live in chaos.

JR: Ah, okay, that makes sense. I once read an article that scientists found that parents who allowed their children to be more creative also allowed more clutter, so that makes perfect... it matches up exactly with what you're saying. Whereas when my slightly intense need for no clutter, I probably didn't allow as much creativity as I should have (Laughs) so I'm trying to rebalance that now in my second, I guess, half of being a mom. (Laughs)

JB: Mm-hmm.



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JR: Second 10 years in it, second decade; oh, that's fascinating. Well, let's say someone's listening and they're overwhelmed with stuff, they know they have to declutter, what advice or what steps would you give them?

JB: So the first step... okay, back to the organizing happens in stages. There are 4 steps and they seem very simple and most people get really fired up on the first one, which is the purging or the decluttering phase. And Marie Kondo, you know, came out with her book a couple years ago and then she was on Netflix with her tidying up series, and what I love about Marie is she really encouraged people to clean up and out. So take the time; that's the hardest step of all. The surface clutter is very easy, the things that are broken, the duplicates, the stuff that you just have outgrown and you don't use, it's the second layer that becomes a little bit more complicated and where we tend to stop. You know, "Oh, well, those canisters came from my great-aunt and that was the only thing I got from her and, you know, I don't know that I want to get rid of them." So we keep them but we don't use them and they take up precious space in our house. Or, you know, a husband who has a lot of tools but he doesn't actually fix anything anymore, you know, he does a lot of hiring out, but he's having a hard time getting rid of them. So there's personas that we identify with, whether they're a past persona or a future persona, and I encourage people not to really get stuck on that. It's okay to have a maybe pile when you're sorting and decluttering, you're like, "I'm not really sure if I'm ready to get rid of this, so I'm going to put this over here and then maybe category." And I call it organizational layaway, you know, put it in the garage, put it in a box and put a date on it, you know, "In 3 months, I'm going to revisit this." And usually, they look at it and say, "This is ridiculous. I haven't used it in 3 months and there's just no way that I'm going to get around to it, so I'm going to let this go." So the first step of sorting and decluttering usually takes the longest and it's best to do the entire house at once. So if it takes 6 months, it takes 6 months, if it takes a year, it's okay, just do that part well, and thorough and then the rest of it becomes really easy. But what happens is that we try and jump ahead to step 3, which is where we want to organize our way out of a mess. So we go and buy a bunch of containers and hope that that gets us organized.

JR: Mm. (Laughs)

JB: So, "Okay, I'm going to go to the Target, I'm just going to get some containers," and we end up spending money and storing stuff that we don't need or want.

JR: Yeah, for sure. So you're saying like sort everything in the house. Where do you put it though once you've sorted it and you still have to live there? Don't you need the container?

[Laughter]

JB: So when you sort, let's say you go through your entire house, you sort and declutter, and you look around and it's like, "Alright, we use about 90% of all the stuff, 10% of it maybe has some emotional memory value." You move it around because the flow of the home is really important, going back to the foundation of organization, a place for everything and everything in its place, "Where do the batteries go? Where do the lightbulbs?" Make sure that you have a home for all of the stuff that you plan on keeping. And then within that space, it's really important to just stop and kind of live with it, maybe for



a week, maybe for a month, depending on the room or the category and see what do you need. Use... drawer organizers are some of my favorite. I'm always a big fan of upgrading hangers. You know, simple things that we can do that makes the organization easier to keep up with. But it's usually a very small investment. More than likely we have more than enough containers that we have in the garage that are empty and, you know, we can kind of shop our own organization store. But once we have gotten rid of the excess, figured out where everything is going to live, then look within that space and say, "Do I need a new piece of furniture? Do I need to change my file folders? You know, what do I need and like how important is it to this space in the organization within it?"

JR: Hmm, okay, that makes sense. So you're kind of easing into... it's almost like moving into a new space, but you're still in the space, you're just putting it all somewhere different and then what you need for it to make it even better.

JB: And when you... it's so easy. The point of organization is to make life easy and also to kind of make us happy. What's really awesome, when you know where something is, and if it's not there, then you know you need to replace it. I had a professor ask me once, he said, "Jennifer, do you ever lose your keys?" absolutely not, if they are not in one in 3 places they are definitely lost, and I have never lost my keys. So our homes want to support us and we all want to come home to a space that is welcoming that doesn't require more work. Life is already hard and... and I don't mean hard in a bad way, just we have lots of responsibilities to do when we're out and about in the world. So when we come home, we really want to come home to a space that's welcoming. And when we know where everything goes, we know where it belongs, you know, maybe throughout the week, it becomes out of balance a little. So on Friday, you know, at least for us, around 4:30 or 5:00, we'll spend 30 minutes just putting the house back in order. So when you think about the task of straightening up your home and cleaning, those are like sisters, but organizing is like a distant cousin who lives in another State; that's a whole other family with its own dynamics. When you are organized, it becomes so much easier to clean your home and straighten up.

JR: For sure, faster. And then, you know, also it kind of knocks out your shopping list too because you can see more easily what you're missing; that's true.

JB: Yes.

JR: Cool. And where can people find you if they want to learn more about you and... and the services you're providing for people?

JB: Yeah, my website is jenniferburnham.com, and on Instagram and Facebook, I'm at The Jennifer Burnham.

JR: And do you do virtual services to help people?

JB: Not yet, but I'm working on that for 2019.

JR: Your services right now are in person only, is that what you're saying?

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JB: Correct.

JR: Okay. So, Jennifer, it sounds like you're doing great things, and if anyone listening wants to follow you or learn more about what you're doing, where can they learn more?

JB: So my website is jenniferburnham.com, and on Instagram and Facebook, my handles are at The Jennifer Burnham.

JR: Cool. And so you have a blog in a newsletter that they can sign up for, right?

JB: Yes. And so every week, I write just something that's really personal about organization. I'm also a big proponent of living intentionally with our time and also with our money. So it's a really great place that I'm getting a lot of feedback from fans that say, "Please keep writing, I really find this helpful."

JR: Nice, awesome; so jenniferburnham.com. Okay, well, let's have a quick break for our sponsor and then come back and talk more about your favorite things. I always love hearing about people's favorite books and routines and all the things.

Alright, welcome back, everyone. I'm talking with Jennifer Burnham about decluttering and organization, she had some great tips, and now we're going to talk about some of your favorite things, Jennifer. So let's start with the high point of your life maybe, what's been of the favorite moment of your life?

JB: What a great question. Favorite moment, that's actually an easy answer, I can't believe it didn't come up right away. So 2 years in business, I was contacted by 3M Command Strips and they were running a contest, they were looking for basically a face for their commercial, for their Command Clear products that were coming out later that year. And I submitted a video, I found out that I came in second and I was so heartbroken. I was like, "Oh man, I really wanted to be on their commercial." Well, a few weeks later, I was contacted by Post-It Notes because they're also owned by 3M and they were looking specifically for a professional organizer to do some online commercials for their "necessarize" campaign, and they flew me out to Los Angeles and I filmed 6 commercials in 1 day and it was just a whirlwind of a trip. It was really before I was into using my iPhone and social media, which I hate that it wasn't really documented or captured, but the memories of what that trip was like, it's just really amazing. (Laughs)

JR: Oh, that's cool, you feel kind of famous getting called like that; oh wow.

JB: Yeah! I remember showing up and they said, "Oh, who are you?" and I said, "I'm Jennifer Burnham," and they said, "Oh, you're the talent," and I said, "Oh, no, no, no, I'm the professional organizer, I'm just here to talk about organizing," and they said, "Yes, honey, you're the talent."

[Laughter]

JR: That's great, that's great; funny. Well, what does your morning routine look like, Jennifer?

JB: My morning routine is, ugh, something that I struggle with. I mean, they say mornings are where the



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magic is and I just want to say, "No, I like to sleep good." But I get up early, I get up at 6:30 and I read and I visualize, I do my affirmations. It's a little woowoo as they say, but I found that it's been really, really helpful for me to just kind of connect... just connect with all the stuff that I need to do and connect more with where I want to go.

JR: Mm-hmm. And what's your favorite easy meal?

JB: Oh man, chickpea curry. We're vegan and so we don't eat, you know, any animal products but I love making chickpea curry. And add a little quinoa in there, I will eat that every day of the week.

JR: Mm, that's yummy. Do you have a recipe you might be able to share with us?

JB: Yes, I certainly do.

JR: Oh, okay, we will...

JB: It's not mine by the way.

JR: Oh yeah, that's fine, we'll link to it.

JB: Okay.

JR: It'll be on our show notes page at jenriday.com/162; yummy, I love new recipes, and I haven't ever made chickpea curry so there you go.

JB: Have you ever made curry at all?

JR: Yes, chicken curry I have made, so yum.

JB: Okay.

JR: What's your favorite kitchen gadget?

JB: So I don't like a lot of things in the kitchen because I'm a little OCD and organized, but we have this mini food chopper and it's like a small food processor, I don't know what I would do without it.

JR: I have heard food chopper many times on my show, so everyone, you need a food chopper.

JB: (Laughs)

JR: Is it one of the Pampered Chef ones?

JB: It's not, it's a Cuisinart, and it literally looks just like a mini food processor.



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JR: Oh, okay.

JB: It fits in the counter... cabinet really easily, I love it.

JR: Okay, Cuisinart food chopper; got it, that's great. And your favorite book.

JB: 'Mastering Your Mean Girl' by Melissa Ambrosini. She's Australian and I bet she reads her audiobook, I'm a physical book person, but I really enjoyed her book.

JR: What do you like about it? I mean, I guess I haven't read that one, I'm wondering, "What does that mean; mastering your mean girl?" Does it mean being nicer or being meaner?

[Laughter]

JB: So your mean girl is your ego and the voice inside of us that is telling us, "Who do you think you are to go be a professional organizer?" it's telling us, "Who do you think you are for writing a book?" it's all that mean stuff that we tell ourselves. And the book really is so well written to encourage you to gently close the door on her and say, you know, "No thank you, we don't want any more of your crazy over here."

JR: Oh, okay, I get it, so mastering the ego.

JB: Yes.

JR: Ah, okay, good to know (Laughs). What's your favorite life hack?

JB: Oh, I am so into Evernote.

JR: Mm.

JB: So my other motto that really struggled with not saying today was, "Your brain it's not a filing cabinet," and I really don't keep... I just don't remember things. If it's not written down or if it's not in an email, I tend to not remember it. Well, I started using Evernote a couple of months ago to keep track of notes and just all those pieces of paper that tend to be laying around our house, and I am just really into it now, because you can access it from your phone. So if something comes up, you're having lunch with a friend, you know, she gives you a quote or tells you a book to read and it's like, "Oh, I'm going to go add this to my list really quickly."

JR: Mm, that's easy. Does it have an app on your phone? You don't have to use your browser, they have an app?

JB: Yep, app on a phone or iPad.

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JR: Wow, that's great, that's really cool. Okay, and what does it mean for you to be a vibrant happy woman?

JB: So, for me, being a vibrant happy woman is doing more listening and less talking and seeing how I can better serve those around me in my relationships. And I found that when I start to give into others by listening, even just the simple act of listening, then my cup then becomes full to overflowing and my life is much more vibrant. I had no idea, especially in a relationship, that it wasn't all about me.

[Laughter]

JB: I'm like, "What? I thought it was." And I actively started to listen more and talk less, and it's amazing what people will tell you and it's also amazing the connection that you can feel when you're not trying to fill this space with your own words.

JR: Yeah, for sure. I agree, it's so filling to connect, it's like an energetic exchange or something when you do that.

JB: Mm-hmm.

JR: And what a gift. Few people take the time to listen, I mean, it's becoming very rare. I find that depending on whom I'm hanging out with, if they're in my intimate friends circle, they probably know how to listen somewhat or they won't be in my intimate friends circle (Laughs). But when I...

JB: Right.

JR: ... interact with regular people, I feel like 80% of the time they're just desperate to talk about themselves. And I think that's because nobody listens to anybody else, and if they could just be...

JB: Agree.

JR: ... heard, they wouldn't need to do that; so, what a gift.

JB: Agree.

JR: And a challenge from you to our listeners.

JB: So my challenge to listeners is to stop, drop, and wait. When you're in elementary school and they tell you if you catch on fire to stop, drop, and roll, we tend to live at a very feverish pace as if we are on fire. And so I challenge folks that if they are feeling like they're burning out a little bit or they're burning the candle at both ends to just stop, look around and pay attention. And start to ask some questions, you know, "Why am I buying this? What am I saying yes to? Am I living like I'm on fire? Am I going in the right direction?" And just get some clarity, get some white space, and it's amazing how you can really shift quickly.

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JR: (Laughs) That sounds amazing; white space, slow down, stop...

JB: Yes.

JR: ... drop and wait. Yes, for sure. Well, I...

JB: Yes.

JR: I love that advice. Well, Jennifer, I appreciate you being on the show a lot. And remember, everyone, you can find Jennifer at jenniferburnham.com. Thanks so much for being here, Jen.

JB: Thank you so much, it was a pleasure.

JR: Take care.

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