



Photo credit: Daniel Shepard

Declutter to Move



What are you passionate about?

What are you good at?

What do you love to do when you're not working?

On a road trip at a pivotal time in Teri Webster's life, she was finally able to answer those simple questions and form a plan that would redirect the course of her career. She had just finished an audiobook by Dan Miller called "48 Days to the Work You Love" and was inspired to seize the moment in her life and start her own business.

The Beginnings

Early in her career in Phoenix, Arizona, Teri worked for AAA Auto Club guiding tours and cruises. During several cruises to Alaska, she fell in love with the state. But when 9/11 happened, the travel industry plummeted, and she wasn't able to come to Alaska as often as she had been. "My heart was aching for it," she recalled. "I was watching a show about Alaska on the Travel Channel and I began to cry because I was missing it so much," she confessed.

Later that month, Teri requested to go on a trip back to Alaska, but her boss denied it. That was the breaking point. After working for AAA for twenty years, she vowed to her boss that she would be in Alaska in a year, and it wouldn't be working for them. As soon as her decision was made, she experienced total inner peace— even though she would be uprooting her entire life.

Teri's stellar faith also played a key role in her decision to come north. She recalls reading the Bible during those transitional times and receiving confirmation after confirmation to go. "Everything was just pointing to me going for it," she said.

Although she was peaceful about her plans, she had a level of trepidation about telling her family that she was leaving. She had a house, a mortgage, a dog, a good job and benefits. From the outside looking in, what was she lacking that merited leaving it all behind to move 4,000 miles away?

"I was fearful to tell my family. For six months I was having nightmares about what my parents would say about all this," she remembers. But all her worrying was for naught. Her family wholeheartedly supported her dreams, especially after she told them that she had been hired on with Holland America for the summer. With much support and encouragement, Teri moved to Alaska in 2007.

Upon arrival, she worked in the tourism industry for several years and then took a job with the State. After years of working there, she capitalized on a change in supervisors to take a break and reevaluate her life. Again, she quit her long-time job in pursuit of something bigger.

The Pivotal Road Trip

Teri had saved enough money to embark on a seven-week road trip to visit family and friends scattered throughout the lower 48. With both hands on the wheel and miles ahead, she had time and space to think about what was next in her life. It was then that she heard the audiobook that asked her such big, fundamental questions. To her surprise, she discovered several things: she loves helping people and she loves organizing. As she drove, it came into focus that it was deeply ingrained in her DNA to logically sort through other people's things to help them shed clutter and move forward with their lives.

"For as long as I can remember I've been volunteering to help people pack, or to help friends that are moving sell some of their things online," she says. "I like to see a cluttered mess get organized. I love to see stuff that needs to be gone... gone. I love to see progress, it's just fun for me!" With that aim, the seed of a dream began to germinate.

Coupling her talents with her deep love for Alaska, Teri found the answer for her new vocation. "It all just sort of came together," she recalls. Understanding that Alaska tends to be a transient state, she dreamt of launching a business to help people move.

Teri hadn't even returned to Alaska from her road trip when a friend and former co-worker told her that she was relocating to the lower 48 after 30 years of living in Alaska. "So, as soon as I got back, I had a client already," she chuckled. Since that first client, her new business "Declutter to Move" has been steadily picking up steam, officially opening in May of this year.

Challenges

Teri values her clients and spends a lot of time with them to help reduce the stress of moving and organizing. One of her biggest challenges is having to tell people that some of the things they have treasured are not as valuable as they thought. Reality versus people's estimation of value can really be quite different, and she graciously endeavors to educate her clients about those differences. She explains, "I'm a researcher at heart. I find I'm spending a lot of time when I'm not at their home, researching and trying to figure out how to price things."

Teri works to determine the value of the items her customers are looking to sell, and sometimes that's a harder task than it seems. She recalls working to clean out a home after someone had passed away. Family members living out of state had called her and requested that she sell whatever she could and dispose of the rest. As she worked through the house, she discovered four large boxes under a pile of wood. Inside, there seemed to be big, thick, heavy windows of some kind. She couldn't figure out what type of windows they were and what their value was, so she took photos and posted them on Facebook and Craigslist with the caption "mystery windows." She asked in her post A.) if anyone knew what they were and, B.) if they wanted them, to make an offer. In a short amount of time, she got an unexpected response. Laughing, she exclaimed, "they were the front windows of 737 jet! Like, wow! Okay!"

Her Dream Job

People reach out for Teri's expertise for many reasons. Some are seniors who are leaving longtime homes to downsize. Some are whole families who are moving out of Alaska. Some are out-of-state relatives of a deceased loved one, who need assistance cleaning out a home. Others are professionals and realtors, seeking to prepare a house to put on the market. Regardless of the reasons for needing her help, she embraces each challenge in her new dream-job.

With a passion for detail, organization, and research, Teri brings definite expertise to people by alleviating the burden of uncluttering and moving. She knows parting with belongings and moving are stressful things for people, so she kindly walks beside them, shepherding the process forward with finesse. "I help them pack, sell, and declutter to move!" Teri exclaims with pride. And now, this little road-trip-inspired business is off to the races.

Editor's Note: Each month, we choose someone in our community as the subject of our monthly feature: A Day in the Life. The stories you read here have an accompanying "photo story" on our website; a recorded interview and more photos put together by photojournalist Daniel Shepard.