

Cris Sgrott w_ Nettie Owens 10.17.18

Nettie: Hi. I'm Nettie Owens. And today I'm back with the Cris Sgrott of Organizing Maniacs. I'm so excited to bring you this interview as the continuing process unfolds for the Creating Momentum book. Cris, would you introduce yourself and tell us who you are, what you do and how you help people.

Cris: Yes, I am Cris Sgrott, and I am outside Washington, DC, and I own Organizing Maniacs. And we specialize in helping clients with brain-based challenges, so the majority of our clients have ADD, ADHD, OCD, and hoarding tendencies. And we help them mostly residentially just get more organized, de-clutter, manage their time, manager their space, manage their lives and things like that.

Nettie: So what does that do when you're able to work with somebody to help them manage their time or manage their space? What does that mean for them?

Cris: Sometimes I wonder if that really means anything to them. But I think that I got into this work eerily accidentally, and it's been the most rewarding work I have ever done in my entire life. My team makes fun of me all the time because randomly I will share things like, "Oh, I used to do that for a living." And they'd be like, "How many jobs have you had?" And I think it's ... I always surprise them with a new job, and sometimes I surprise myself, and I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I didn't do that for a living temporarily." So I think the work that we do is just so ... it's so intimate and so amazing. We're so lucky to get invited into people's homes and lives, and they're opened, and they are willing to learn and they want to change and they want to do something different.

And it's such an amazing experience, and I believe they experience it kind of the same way we do. You build these relationships and friendships with people. And in the process I learned from every single client that I get to work with, just like they learned from me on to how to have better skills about being more organized.

And it's very funny because yesterday I saw a client that I hadn't seen in six years, and she was really messy when I first saw her. And I worked with her for quite a bit, just kind of organizing her entire home. And then they moved and then I helped them get settled into the new home, and then I feel like they were in a really good place. But you know you don't hear from people for like six years, you have all kinds of thoughts about what's been happening, where they're at. And then when I went in there ... And she had some really good system still that we had to set up for them, and they were still using it.

And of course they're moving again, so as I walked around and she gave me a tour and we talked about what she needed help with, it was really amazing to see and hear how she had internalized a lot of the stuff that we had talked about six years ago, and how she's still using the same tools. And that is so rewarding when you get to work with somebody, and it really makes an impact in their lives. So I'm very lucky that way.

Nettie: Yeah, that it is, it's amazing to see the connection. Because you don't always get that, I mean, it's not the case in every profession that you can see the results.

Cris: Well, sometimes we work with people, and we don't get to see the results at, right? Because we come, we do our thing, and we set up the systems and then we leave. And her was a perfect

example where it was just like, "Did it ever work? Did she benefit from it? How did it impact her life?" And then six years later I get to come back and see that impact. And it's such a cool experience to do that.

Nettie: So you mentioned that you got into this work and industry by accident. Would you mind sharing your story?

Cris: Yeah, so I moved to Virginia in 2001, right before 9/11. And I had to work for a nonprofit organization for a real long time, and when the kind of world became chaotic I decided that I wanted to do things that I hadn't done before. And that I didn't want to be in a cubicle anymore. I wanted to do something that was different.

I have always been very structured and my work has been very structured, and I did a lot of corporate work. But I wanted to try something that was different. So I went to work in a restaurant, I thought like ... I felt like that would be fun and different and I'll be with people all the time. And that was like the biggest mistake I ever made, working in a restaurant was just totally nutty. And while I worked at that restaurant I met a group of people that were running a very small business in Fairfax, Virginia, and they had an amazing business plan and through that process they recruited me to go work for them. And I worked for them for about five years.

And they were like a true start-up which was a fun experience for me because I get bored, and they basically let me do whatever I wanted. So I did business development for them, I did marketing and created tools for them. I help them develop some key divisions for the business. And we seem to have been doing really well, and unfortunately the real estate market crashed in 2007, and through that process they unfortunately went bankrupt.

And when they went bankrupt I was like ... I was a little angry because I was like, "Here I spent five years helping these people build their business." And for no fault of their own or maybe some fault of their own, but mostly on an economic fault of the universe, they went bankrupt and I was like, "Here I am again having to start over." And I had thought ... like I had always wanted to work for myself, and I just wondered, "Do I have any talents? Do I have any services that I can offer people that they would be willing to pay for?"

And my first thought was like I could start dog-walking business because I love dogs and I think that would be fun. And then I ran through like ... I assess risk on a high basis, I could have been an statistician and worked for an insurance company. And it's like, "Well, pets are like children and people get really touchy about those things." And so I was like ... plus I don't like to be outside in the middle of the winter and you have to walk dogs in the middle of January, so I was like check that off the list.

And then I found organizing purely accidental, I had been a project manager at this time so I've been searching project management jobs. And for some universe reason I found one of the local organizers that was ... She was a project manager and a professional organizer. And she had a beautiful website, it was very informative. And one thing led into another and one link leads into another, and I found the industry. And I called one of my friends and I said, "I found this thing about organizing, and I'm thinking about doing it." And she was like, "Oh, you would be really good at it." And I was like, "You think?"

And so I called ... I had been, I spent my whole career in sales and business develop, so I literally I got on the phone and I started telling people like, "Hey, I'm going to do this thing, like do you have

any need? Do you need any consulting?" And a couple of my subcontractors pretty took me up on the offer, and that was my first ... they were my first two clients. I started consulting with them and their business and organizing systems and creating processes and flow, which was a little bit more project-oriented and less residential, but it became a seamless transition as I went into people's homes to organize their business they'd be like, "Can you help me organize my pantry? And my kitchen is a complete mess. And my kids' playroom is a complete disaster. My storage room hasn't have any space in forever." So it just became a nice flow. And before I knew it I was super busy and then I started growing my team.

So I mean, I think in about like six months of like consulting ... that I started consulting that I had literally gone on the phone. I decided that this was where I was meant to do with my life, and I quit looking for a job. And I started making enough money that I could pay the rent, and the rest of it is history as we know.

Nettie: And you've really made a name for yourself, both in the organizing industry and as a business professional. So you've been able to grow your business and kind of be recognized for that as well.

Cris: Yeah, thank you for saying that. Yes, last year I was nominated for the Napal Founders Award, so I was one of the two finalists. And that is an honor to be in an industry where people recognize that you have contributed. And I am always a willing participant to create and help and develop and volunteer in our industry, just because I think that there is so much opportunity in what we do.

And we still haven't quite figured out how to get these businesses off the ground and become multi-million dollar businesses like other industries have. And I think there's a lot of work we still have to do. But I am a willing participant, I have a great time. You and I have known each other for a long time, and we are very lucky to be in such a community of women that really support and respect each other, and that is really ... That it's pretty amazing to know that at anytime we can pick up the phone and there's somebody that we can call and that we can collaborate with and that we can grow together. So I am always glad to be in this industry with the women that we're in the industry with.

Nettie: Me too, some of my best friends right here. Well, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the book I'm working on, it's Creating Momentum. And in this book I outline the nine principles that businesses who have achieved sustainable success have implemented in their organization. And these are vision, mission, core values and culture, time and task management, organization and systems, and strengths, connection, and focus. And hearing those nine principles, does one of those stand out for you as the thing that your company does really well or the principle that has really led to your business' growth?

Cris: Yeah, so congratulations on writing a book. That takes a lot of effort and time. And you're just so smart, I have always looked up to you, so I'm really excited to be here participating in the research and part of the book. So thank you so much for asking me to do this with you, I really appreciate you.

Nettie: You're welcome. Thank you.

Cris: You're my girl crush. I think the thing that always ... I think one thing that really resonates with me is the time and task management, I think that's just because that is ... we are very organized

people and that is like the significant amount of the work that we do for our clients is task management I think.

Recently I had a call with somebody and they're very engineered brain like type, and like he had really interesting questions and I said at the end of it like I answered all of his questions and then I said, "It's not like what we do for people, is like brain surgery," right? It's pretty straightforward and simple, but I think one thing that we provide as an organizing industry for clients is that we keep people focused. And when we keep people focused we help them accomplish more. We help them see tasks differently; we help them break things down into ways that they never thought about.

Because I think the real reason why people get bogged down is because they get overwhelmed. When they get overwhelmed there's too much to do, they don't know how to break down the project. The default is to say like, "I'm not going to work on this now. I'm going to work on something else." So we are really good at helping people through that process, right? To just see the big picture and then narrow it down into smaller tasks and then get those tasks accomplished. And therefore, they have more peace, they have more time.

I think tasks also and time management are very intertwined, like you can't have time management without managing your tasks and prioritizing and figuring out what you're going to do and how you're going to do it. So I also think people use those two words interchangeably to mean the exact same thing, right? Sometimes I hear people saying like, "Oh, I need a better time management." I'm like, "Really? All you need is better task management. It's funny you do that." So, I don't know, am I answering your question correctly?

Nettie: There's no ... Thankfully there's no right or wrong answer. It's wonderful to be able to just gather information and hear how each person does it. And you're right, and that's why I put them together because you can't have time management without task management and vice versa, and they are interchangeable. So what do you do within your business to manage your time and your tasks? And how does that help you grow?

Cris: So I used to be like a task manager now, crazy maniac, because I used to just be so obsessive-compulsive about it. I used to just be like totally nuts about time management and structure and planning. And as I get older I become a little bit more like I want to believe a little bit more Zen, which is still ... somebody recently said that to me, she's like, "If that's your version of Zen, I don't want to meet the other person before." Because she was like, "You're pretty uptight when it comes to like task management." And I was like, "You know what? It is a lighten up version of myself."

But I do have a couple of things that I'm pretty strict about like I try never to have meetings in the morning. And that's because that is my productive ... That is my most productive time. And a couple of years ago I read a book called *The Power of When* by Dr. Michael Breus, and that was like one of my favorite books of all time. I teach classes about that book because I feel like it just couldn't be out on the world anymore if I possibly could.

But he talks about understanding your chronotype which is like in the outside world it's really just managing your energy. So if you are a person that likes to wake up super early and like to get to work early and you crash at around 7, 8:00 in the morning you have to honor that. And that is my personal ... that is my energy type. So I get up between 5:00 and 5:30 every day. And if I wait to do my work after lunch it just never happens, so I am really protective of my mornings. I try not to ... I see client's in the morning, but when I'm not seeing clients I never have any meetings in the

morning. I try to like save that time to get work done. And so I save all my fun stuff, my phone calls, my interviews, my virtual coffee dates, and all of those things that would be fun for me - I leave those for the afternoon, because I wouldn't be productive anyways.

So one thing that I do that I also try to teach my clients is to just honor your energy and understand when are you productive. I work with a lot of people that are ADD, and they are not morning people at all, like they are not fully awake until like at least 10, 11:00 in the morning. So if you take that in context to like my 5:00AM, they wouldn't be productive until like maybe from 12 to like 4, so I normally tell them like, "In the morning you should have your meetings, you should make your phone calls, you should do all the things that are not very inclusive into like honoring your energy. And then you should save the afternoon for your productive time."

So it's like understanding how do you structure your day that's way more important that people don't ... people don't really to think about that, right? We have all been taught that we should be like everybody else, we should try to work 9:00 to 5:00 and we should try to like have this super structured schedule. And we're trying to live lives that were designed for like 30, 40 years ago. And it's something that we're going to have to embrace the fact that that doesn't work for us anymore.

Nettie: Right. I'm so thankful that you shared kind of the diversity that exists within this time management realm, that it's not about just following one prescribed method of getting up, getting ... not just following the Cris method, to get up at 5:30 and work and be productive in the morning. But it could be the John method when he ... and he gets up and does it and get started with his non-focused tasks first, and then he does his focused work in the afternoon. So I'm so glad that you differentiated on that.

And you're right; I think what I've learned the most from these interviews is that the people who have done well in business have seen a path that was different than what everybody else was walking on. And have either brought the awareness of that path to other people or just decided to travel down it and see where it led them, and it took them to great results. So I think that's encouraging to know that if you feel like something doesn't fit for you it's okay and you can forge your own way.

Cris: Yeah, which I think it's ... I think we live at times when it's okay to be a little bit more different, right? It's okay to say like I'm not a morning person. I think companies are also embracing this like everyday flexibility. There are a lot of moms into the workforce that needs flexibility because of their children, and there are a lot of dads that are like super involved in like raising children and they need flexibility. So I think companies are starting to embrace the fact that we're not going to work from 9:00 to 5:00 anymore. And sometimes I go to the grocery store in the middle of the day and it's like packed, and I'm like, "Right on people, we're all doing flex time, right? Because we know that we're going to be working late. And this is the best time to come and get your bread and milk."

So I think we're seeing a lot more of that, like people really embracing the fact that they may need longer for lunch breaks to just calm their brain down or to transition from one thing to another, that we're not going to be in the office from 9:00 to 5:00 anymore. And I think that is basically my quest in life is to remind people that we are trying to use time management tools that were built for a different time, like we live in the age of technology, flexibility, that we just don't have to be tortured anymore.

Nettie: Very true. And I just had such an interesting image with that description. So I'm going to kind of shift gears a little bit here. In business ... if you've been in business for more than a day then

you've faced a challenge. Something that hasn't gone well, something that maybe you feel like you failed at, but there's always lessons that are learned in that space. And I'm wondering for you, has there been a challenge that you faced or something that just flopped completely that the lesson that you learned allowed you to grow? So if you wouldn't mind sharing, I know it's a big question.

Cris: Yes, that is a big question. I'm thinking like every ... Nettie, every day is a challenge. Every day is a lesson. I think like owning a business has been one of the most difficult things I have ever accomplished, and I have owned Organizing Maniacs for 11 years now and I think today if I looked back and you have told me the journey I would go through, I don't know that I would have yes to owning a business.

Nettie: Run away screaming, right?

Cris: I would run away and screaming. So I think one defining moment in my business for me is that ... And I've been very lucky, I have amazing clients, I have a lot of loyalty, I have a lot of repeat business. And I have a lot of referrals; over 60% of our business is repeat and referred clients. And I think that when you have that level of loyalty it also ... it challenges you to expand the system and grow. And I think one ... I remember one time I was so exhausted, I probably had worked like six days non-stop for like months and I barely ... like I should say six days, but like on Sundays I would like catch up on accounting and bookkeeping and marketing and follow up with clients and buying products and doing donations. And like I was still working, I just wasn't with clients.

And I was just so exhausted, and I remember literally laying under my desk and just like crying, and like thinking like, "Oh, my God, what have I done? What am I doing? Where am I going? And how do I get out of this? And how do I grow? And how do I get help?" And literally asking God like, "Give me a sign. Just help me. Just help me figure this out, because I just don't think I can sustain it."

And what came out of that wasn't like a light from the sky that said, "Ohhh," but I think that I opened myself up to the options of the world, right? And what I did was I hired a business coach, and you and I have worked with the same coach so I went to work with Fabian Fredrickson of boldheart.com and she changed my life. And I think that experience of like complete exhaustion and depletion and not knowing what to do, and then finding her was just such an amazing experience. And she went on to ... I'm a huge fan of hers, and she went on to change my life in so many ways. And she also helped me like tripled my business.

So that was like one thing that came out of challenge. And sometimes I think back to like ... And I do tell this story a lot to people about like being under my desk and crying as a way to just like remind people that the lows are really low and the highs can be really high. And then there's like every day in between that we get up, we show up, and we do our thing, but every day is just completely filled with challenges.

But that experience opened me to just always ask for help and to reach out and to develop and be in a community. I think that was about the time that like you and I became friends, right? Because I was like, "You're in Baltimore and I'm in DC, and we're close enough." And that we developed these amazing relationships with people around the country and in our organizing industry. I developed amazing relationships with business people. There's my Bold Heart people. I have done other programs like I did the Goldman Sachs 10,000 small business which was an amazing opportunity to expand and understand growth.

I am one of those people that I'm like, "Okay, I don't cry under my desk anymore." And like when I'm trying to learn something about my business and how do I expand and how do I grow, I go out and find smart women I can talk to and I pick their brain and then I say, "Okay, I don't know this, but maybe you do." And then sometimes just verbally asking the questions and just being in the presence of others is just really helpful. So I don't know that I answer your question right again. But I feel like opening up to the opportunities of what I didn't know has been a tremendous opportunity for me to grow and learn.

Nettie: And opening up to that meant huge growth in your business. I mean, [unclear 25:19] your business, that's not a small thing to do. And your business was already successful, so I mean, to take that and to make it even better.

Cris: Yeah, well, growth is always very challenging because it comes with like payroll and cash flow and people management and more clients. And that complexity is like it's a machine and it just grows the way it needs to grow, but I've been able to do it with integrity where my clients are still getting the same service that they used to when I was working with them, and I have been able to build a team with amazing women. They're just so incredibly talented. And then I have a support team that is pretty amazing too.

So I feel like for the first time ever this year I took two weeks off and I went to Paris, and while I was there I was like feeling a little guilty, but you know what? The system just worked magically and beautifully. And it was just like ... I was just like, "Okay, I have to take credit for all of the work and all of the effort that I did."

And all of the pain, right? It's like I think learning how to do things that are outside of your comfort zone is painful and it's a stretch and it is hard, but whenever you step out your comfort zone just a little bit there's always an opportunity there to learn something new that you didn't already know. I'm pretty adventurous, I've become a pretty big risk taker, controlled risk taker for organizing ...

Nettie: I was going to say, wait, you said you measured every risk.

Cris: I do, I do measure everything, and I'm pretty calculated on my risks. But I have learned how to just take risks in a way that it feels good. And then I think that has allowed me to expand to where I am today.

Nettie: So before we go, is there anything else that you would like to share with those that might be reading this book or watching this video that are trying to implement these nine principles, what would you say to them?

Cris: So I think the one thing that I like to remind people is (1) to just always be kind to yourself, just because making changes is always difficult, right? Like, remember me laying under my desk crying about like where do I go from here, what do I do, and how do I change? And it's like even though we're all crying at some point on the inside, just trying to make a change, we want to as human beings we always want to grow, we want to live a better life. But that is hard, so be kind to yourself as you go into that process.

And (2) I think outside of the box, like we have especially in the ADHD community we ... I don't have ADD but like the community is always forced into a world of like super organized people. Like, the world is developed for the organized not for the creatives, so remind yourself that just because the world says we should be in this box - that doesn't mean that has to be your box. You can create your

own box, and honor the fact that you are talented and creative and smart and funny, and you have succeeded in a ton of other stuff that may not have anything to do with like organization. And that's totally cool, right? Because just like I wake up and I hired a personal trainer or I'm learning how to learn French, so I have a French tutor. And there are lots of things that we're not very good at, there are lots of things that I'm really good at, and I can just honor myself for those things.

Nettie: Beautiful.

Cris: Thank you so much.

Nettie: Well, thank you so much for coming on today and for sharing all that you did. I'm sure, I know for a fact that someone who's watching is going to say that is exactly what I needed to hear.

Cris: Thank you.

Nettie: So thank you. And this will be up and ready and part of the book soon.

Cris: All right, thank you so much, Nettie. Good luck.