

August 4, 2013

## SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT CLEANING

What does it really mean to be someone whose job it is to clean for a living? Whether it's working as a maid in a domestic capacity, or as someone whose job it is to clean the streets, houses, apartments, yards, or the work places of other people, the one thing everyone whose livelihood falls in the category of cleaning will agree on is that this work is not highly valued by the majority of the people who rely on this essential service. Many think the work of cleaning is only for the disenfranchised, or that it is a last resort for those who've had a reversal of fortune and are without options. But that's not the case. There are many for whom cleaning is a noble calling that's based on integrity and genuine love for the work.

In our society and many societies around the world, cleaning for a living is considered to be a lowly form of employment. If you were to ask a wide range of people who clean to describe how they are treated, in all likelihood, the majority of those people will tell you that they are not properly acknowledged. They will tell you that they are not paid fairly, that they are taken for granted and that they are, for the most part, invisible to their employers. This attitude has many origins, not least, a long and painful history that's deeply rooted in slavery. Sadly, the residue of that time still lingers in the consciousness of many.

The true value of cleaning as an essential service has not received proper acknowledgment or respect. To this day, many mature women who clean or are employed as maids in private service, are still referred to as, "the girl," which is demeaning and continues to perpetuate a negative stereotype. It is important for everyone to understand that service does not mean servitude. For these archaic attitudes to change there must be a shift in the consciousness of those who receive this special service, as well as those who provide it.

Cleaning as an occupation is noble work. Doing this work requires dedication, intelligence, disciplined focus, inner and outer strength, honesty, integrity, and not least, a buoyant sense of humor. When someone comes into your space to clean, it is an intimate act that requires trust, honor and respect on both sides. To clean for someone is to offer the utmost support that enhances that person's life. It is a partnership and like any partnership the relationship must be positively cultivated if it is to remain healthy and robust.

In the early 90's after leaving my position at a major investment banking firm, I was having breakfast with my dear, friend, Eunice who runs her own cleaning service. She was short staffed that day and with great difficulty she asked me if I would help her out of a difficult situation. She needed me to go immediately to the office of a client and clean the bathroom, the kitchen and empty the garbage at every desk. The moment caught me by surprise. I did not see it coming. But as soon as she asked, I knew instantly that it was a test of everything I had thought myself to be, and in a flash, I knew the only answer I could give her was "YES." That moment took me down a new path which lasted for over a decade. It was not an easy road, but it was a road that changed me profoundly.

Eunice is a master at what she does. Learning the intricacies of cleaning under her tutelage was a profound experience. My tenure with her allowed me to observe the business up close. In my former work, high standards of excellence were required so imagine my surprise when I realized that Eunice had the same work ethic and insisted on the same high standards of excellence that I was held to in the corporate world.

I was in constant awe of Eunice and I gained a much deeper understanding and respect for the work. I often marveled at how many employed, professionals, came through and worked as part of the crew. They were not just there to make extra cash; they were there because they loved, admired and trusted Eunice, and in their heart they knew that cleaning was not only therapeutic, it was good for the soul.

It would be misleading to say that cleaning is easy work. It is not. Some days were harder than others and those hard days tested me physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The process of cleaning was often solitary which gave me the space to contemplate and deconstruct my life. The experience was transformative and illuminating. The work of dusting, sweeping, vacuuming, scrubbing, scraping, polishing and fine-tuning was a metaphor for the inner work I was doing on myself. For me, cleaning was deep, soul work.

I was part of Eunice's crew on many projects large and small. Although she had regular private clients her business had expanded into large post-construction cleanup projects which offered many opportunities to observe the subtleties of the business from the inside out. I witnessed again and again how she was able to transform newly renovated spaces that were filled with debris, plaster dust, dirt and grime, into masterful works of art. Through her guidance, her impeccable

cleaning prowess, her exquisite work ethic, her eagle-eyed attention to the details, and her love for the work, she resurrected spaces that were energetically dead and magically brought them back to life.

Like everything in life, there's the good, the bad, and the ugly side of life and the cleaning business is no different. There were many instances where a client failed to recognize the magnitude of the work that was delivered. It became clear to me, early on, that there was a basic disconnect between many of the clients and the special-ness of the service that was being providing. On many occasions, upon completion of the work, payment was bargained down, delayed, and sometimes withheld, and in some cases where there were ongoing relationships, many clients failed to give raises even after many years of service. I saw that there were gross imbalances and inconsistencies within the field which led me to conclude that light needed to be shed on this issue so that the perceptions around cleaning within the service industry could begin to change.

Everyone, regardless of their chosen vocation, wants to be properly acknowledged and valued. It is not unusual for employers to disrespect the person who is cleaning for them. Not all, but many, hold an attitude of elitism and entitlement and treat their employees as though they are slaves. Often, unfair requests are loaded on to an already full plate, for which there is never any additional compensation. Since there are no structured guidelines in cleaning many who clean are simply overworked and under paid.

It is not a stretch to say that the humanity of those who are providing the most intimate service within a clients' private inner sanctuary is often disregarded. There is no question that this attitude breathes resentment. However, when a client comes along who really understands the process and values what they are receiving, everyone is uplifted.

To fully understand what Eunice does, I must elaborate by saying, there's cleaning and then there's Eunice's cleaning. What's the difference? Eunice stands in a class by herself. For her, cleaning is not just the work of removing dirt and grime. Cleaning is the way in which she administers love and light to her clients. For Eunice, cleaning is love in action. Eunice's mission is to positively transform the lives of those who work for her, as well as those she is called upon to serve, one project at a time. She genuinely loves her work and consistently strives to deliver the highest quality not just by working hard and demanding the same from her

team but by infusing each space energetically with her love, her care, her integrity and what we now refer to as, "her special magic." Her one-pointed approach has a transforming effect. Through her unfailing love for what she does, she is determined to lift the stigma around cleaning so that the sacredness of the work and the artistry of cleaning can be revealed in such a way that it elevates the lives of everyone it touches to higher ground.

What Eunice brings to each client is priceless. No amount of money can properly compensate her for her all-encompassing dedication to delivering the highest quality of cleaning to her clients. She never falters in her resolve to constantly raise the bar, which, like osmosis, she is able to convey to her crew. Again and again, everyone who works with her on a project morphs into a cohesive unit for the sole purpose of delivering excellence.

Cleaning is a mysterious process. It's a metaphor for life. It is symbolic of cleaning up our own "stuff" and putting our own house in order. Cleaning allows us to scrub away the dirt and grime within our consciousness so that we can see our own radiance, our own divine splendor.

Whatever service we offer, whether it is cleaning or running an empire, we must endeavor to offer it with love. It is the love that transforms. There are reasons beyond our ability to comprehend why we find ourselves in certain situations, but from my own experience, I can confidently say, it is always, always, for growth, healing, and transformation.

Although the perceptions around cleaning are slow to change there will come a time when the sacredness of cleaning will be fully recognized, understood, valued and appreciated for the true gift that it is. When that time comes, and it will, I believe it will create a new paradigm based on love, gratitude, fairness and mutual respect.

~Millie