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Taking Stock After a Disaster

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Mr. Pelonero brings personal experience to his job of conducting home inventories after natural disasters. He lost his own home in Hurricane Ike in 2008. Credit Michael Stravato for The New York Times

Michael Pelonero, 34, is director of field representatives for [Enservio](#), a Needham, Mass.-based provider of services and software for insurers.

Q. What does Enservio do, and what do you do for Enservio?

A. Enservio inventories the contents of homes after natural disasters as part of the claims process for insurance companies. When companies contact us after a flood, fire, hurricane or tornado, I coordinate the work to be done by the field teams and work on site with them.

Isn't it difficult to inventory homes that have received huge damage?

I'd argue that it's one of the most difficult parts of settling an insurance claim. We've seen bedroom closets where the contents are one big block of ice after a fire company extinguished a house fire in freezing temperatures. Sometimes items have been burned beyond recognition, and other times gale force winds have moved them, or tornadoes have lifted them and dropped them miles away.

How long have you been doing this?

For six years. I live in Galveston, Tex., and I lost my own home in Hurricane Ike in 2008. The health club I was managing there didn't reopen, so I lost my job.

Does your personal experience affect how you do your job?

I think it does. I try to take the most difficult jobs, because I know what people are going through. I can walk in and say I've been there. You feel isolated after a disaster. Many times you can't lean on your neighbor for clothes or gas because they're in the same boat. Aside from that,

we're strangers in people's homes, and we meet them during a traumatic time. We're going through their personal possessions and asking detailed questions to help them mentally recreate their home's contents. We spend time building a relationship to make people feel comfortable with us.

How hard is it to deal with customers after disasters?

I never know which people have received or will receive professional counseling, but sometimes we become life coaches by proxy. A client may have lost a family member or a pet and is grief-stricken. They want to know where they go from here or what to do about getting replacement medication. Because we're there and are compassionate, we sometimes end up doing more than our job description requires.

Vocations asks people about their jobs. Interview conducted and edited by Patricia R. Olsen.