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COUNTING HOUSE

Help Wanted: When Managing Your Home Requires a Full-Time Hire

Struggling to keep up with the demands of maintaining a property? Maybe it's time to hire an estate manager

By *Beth DeCarbo*

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Imagine your house is a company—and you're the CEO.

Your business partner (spouse) complains of cost overruns. The warehouse (garage) roof leaks. A branch office (beach house) is closing for the season. And shareholders (the children) need pricey equipment (laptops) for the new fiscal year.

It looks like upper management could use a new hire or two.

Even the most successful business executives may struggle managing the home front, where operating expenses can reach upward of \$5 million a year. As a result, there's a growing demand for household and estate managers who can do everything from overseeing home renovations to taking the dogs to the vet.

“You hire staff in order to make your life easier and focus on things that are important to you—business, hobbies, friends,” says Stephen Candland, whose company, Private Staff Group, recruits full-time and seasonal employees for households, estates and personal services.

Some people tap into specialized recruiters and agencies to hire household staff, but others may ask their family office—private wealth-management firms that handle family affairs—to oversee hiring for them. Fees vary based on the position and the recruiter, but they typically range from 10% to 45% of the hiree's first year's salary.

Hayden Horowitz, chief executive of Geller Advisors, a multifamily office

An Estate Manager With 14 Properties

Jeremy Schiestel steps inside a home he manages in Los Angeles, Calif.



Estate Manager Jeremy Schiestel places a floral arrangement in the home of a property he manages in Los Angeles. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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based in New York, says many clients turn to him when problems arise, such as excessive spending or lax security. Life changes, such as a death, divorce, or the sale of a business, can also affect staffing needs.

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The first step, Mr. Horowitz says, is to assess the client's portfolio of properties—homes, yachts and planes—and determine the staffing required to manage them. Geller then creates a financial plan that covers operating costs like maintenance, taxes and staffing. Finally, the company helps recruit and place candidates, as well as provide payroll and human-resources support.

Finding qualified candidates is more difficult these days because they need to understand sophisticated technical and environmental systems for residences. At the same time, they must have excellent management and interpersonal skills with staff and family members.

“It is not uncommon for us to review 20 to 40 resumes for a particular position and still have difficulty finding a good fit,” Mr. Horowitz says.



Estate Manager Bryan Peele. PHOTO: VVPICTOGRAPHY

The most sought-after staffer is someone who oversees the people and vendors who make a home run, says Bryan Peele, president of the Estate Managers Coalition, a nonprofit trade group with about 1,700 members. A client with one or two homes may hire a household manager or personal assistant who keeps things

running smoothly. But a homeowner with a sprawling estate or multiple homes might need an estate manager, a person with a range of skills who oversees all aspects of the household. (Titles and job descriptions vary across the industry.)

“People want to elevate their lifestyle and protect what they have,” says Mr. Peele, who is also an estate manager in Los Angeles. “Their house is probably their biggest investment, and they realize they need help taking care of the house while they’re taking care of the kids or traveling for business.”

Estate manager Jeremy Schiestel oversees 14 properties, three planes and one boat for his clients, a couple and their two adult children whose primary residence is in Los Angeles. He manages a staff of about 10 people, as well as vendors, caterers and other service professionals for major projects and events. The job involves extensive travel—at least one trip every other week.

Recently he got a call from a housekeeper who said a plumbing problem

flooded one of the homes—and the owners, who had been traveling, were due to return. “You’ve got to move some things around and act quickly,” Mr. Schiestel, 29, says. “Luckily they have another house here and could stay there. It was a matter of getting the [second] house ready as quickly as possible.”

Once a year, Mr. Schiestel gets a performance review. “At that time, I also make recommendations, like adding more staff, or introducing more products into the house, or saving money by changing vendors.” He receives a base salary, plus a performance bonus, special-projects bonus and Christmas bonus. In all, he says he earns an amount in “the mid-six figures.”



The living room and office of a property Mr. Schiestel manages in Los Angeles. PHOTO: MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

High demand for household and estate managers is driving up salaries, especially in an era of low unemployment.

“It really is a thriving market for estate managers because they’re able to command salaries that are what they’re worth and are, frankly, overdue,” says Mr. Peele of the Estate Managers Coalition. His organization recently placed someone to oversee a large residence in Beverly Hills. The pay: \$300,000 a year. “You typically find that salary for someone managing multiple properties. But nowadays, if you’re finding someone who’s highly qualified, they’ll pay that to maintain just one residence.”

Additional perks aim to attract and retain good people. Mr. Peele says some homeowners let managers use the private jet to take them to places like Hawaii for vacation.

Estate manager Brian Nedley says he specifically sought positions in the Hamptons, in New York, because of the high salaries. At one property, he managed an operating budget of \$2 million a year—not including staff payroll. “It was a rewarding job, but a tough job,” says Mr. Nedley, 54. “The people you’re working for, their time is so precious. They need someone to take care of the bills, register the cars, take care of the animals, so they can enjoy themselves.”

Recently he took a job in Litchfield, Conn., that's nearer to his own home and family. Fortunately for him, the salary is akin to what he was earning in the Hamptons. (He declined to disclose the amount.)

His current position involves overseeing the weekend home and working farm for the owners, a New York City couple in their 50s with two school-age children. This job is different from previous positions because it involves managing 80 acres and the care of alpacas, sheep and horses. That's on top of more typical duties, such as dealing with landscapers, electricians and plumbers. But no job is too small: "I make sure the chef has dinner on time and it's to their liking," he says.

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