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## PERSONAL CONCIERGE

When time is tight, they do it for you

BY ERIKA ENIGK  
CORRESPONDENT

**S**ome businesses are borne out of a need for specialized knowledge or ability. The concierge service, however, began as a way to offer people an asset often more difficult to find - time.

Although concierges have been around for many years, the service in general is growing with the need of time-starved professionals who have taken on longer hours and more responsibility at work.

Pam Sherman began her business, Chicago Anytime Assistants, when her busy work life began getting in the way of running simple personal errands.

"I worked really long hours, just like most people in corporate America," she said. "I wished there was some sort of relief there."

The concierge business caters to busy professionals who simply can't find enough hours in the day to do things like buy groceries or order a wedding gift for a friend. Emily Lytle, co-owner of Endeavor Concierge, said she enjoys providing a service that, while not particularly hard to do, makes a difference in the every day lives of the people she serves.

"There's nothing we do that's really difficult," she said. Often, a task can be as simple as making dinner reservations or taking a client's car to get an oil change. At a time when people are working more and have less time with their families, a concierge service can provide some much-needed relief from the things that must get done but are not enjoyable. Some have standing appointments, some make arrangements ahead of time and others call needing something within a few hours, she said.

"Every day is different," she said. "We try to accommodate everyone at any time."

Many things people ask can be downright boring. One of the services Sherman offers is waiting at a client's house for deliveries or repair. She sometimes takes the opportunity to do a little something extra she knows the client will appreciate, such as emptying the dishwasher.

Both Sherman and Lytle promise that they will try to complete any task that is legal and ethical, and what they can't do themselves, they will help find someone to do. For example, Sherman has served as project manager for a home renovation, interviewing contractors, getting estimates and scheduling work to be done at her client's budget and convenience.

Another common task these days for Lytle's company is to help clients organize rooms in their homes. "A lot of people are just trying to get their lives together," she said.

Sherman hesitates to label any of her clients' requests as strange, lest they feel embarrassed; however, she does enjoy the challenge of completing some of her clients' more unique tasks. For example, a client recently asked her to order a bridesmaid dress from a particular store. The dress, unfortunately, was on back order until after the date of the wedding and not available anywhere else, so Sherman found one on eBay and, with her client's permission, made the purchase.

That story is a perfect example of why people find concierge services so useful, Sherman said.

"Half the reason people get so frustrated running errands is because things always seem to go wrong," she said. "I really enjoy helping people who are in a pinch."

Resourceful individuals will thrive as a concierge, Sherman said. A quick, problem-solving mind is required, as are a great attention to detail and knowledge of the area.

"I want people who are city-savvy and intuitive," she said. Both Sherman and Lytle operate primarily in the city of Chicago but will take assignments in the suburbs as well.

Being a people person is also essential, Lytle said. "You're going to be dealing with people who have high expectations," she said.

Those interested in the job must be willing to work odd hours and must check their egos at the door.

*"Half the reason people get so frustrated running errands is because things always seem to go wrong. I really enjoy helping people who are in a pinch."*

PAM SHERMA, CHICAGO ANYTIME ASSISTANTS

"If some client wants you to come over and pick up after their dog, you have to go over and pick up after that dog," Lytle said. The pay can be as good as a person wants it to be, she said. Those who are willing to work more hours can make a good living, although Sherman said the job can be a great part-time gig as well.

Those going into the business for themselves, rather than seeking work with an existing business, should make sure to create a pricing structure that makes the service affordable, particularly in this economy, Lytle said. A good concierge may actually be able to save money for a customer, making the service not only convenient but a great deal, she said.

"If you structure it the right way, it can actually be more cost effective than doing it

yourself," she said.

Working as a concierge can be very enjoyable, even fun; mundane tasks don't always seem so bad when they aren't cutting into one's own personal time. Lytle said she still minds taking her own car in for an oil change but isn't bothered taking someone else's.

The biggest benefit to the job is the satisfaction that comes with helping someone who truly appreciates it, Sherman said.

"You'd be surprised what picking up someone's dry cleaning does for them," she said. "There's a huge emotional benefit to this job."

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