

A hand is pouring liquid from a silver teapot into a silver tray. The teapot is tilted, and the liquid is captured in the tray. The background is dark, making the silver pieces stand out.

At Your

SERVICE

By Katie Rockman

As far as the vocabulary of opulence goes, the word luxury has always been linked with the word leisure: at your leisure, leisure time, leisurely enjoyed. But, with the grind of the daily nine to five, the bills piling up on the coffee table, and the demands of the husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/child/parent/pet leaving you wishing you had a clone, leisure may be a bit hard to find. Good news, though, time has just gone on the market.

The brokers of this elusive commodity are personal concierges, modern day, on-call butlers ready to take on any task from sorting mail to planning parties to arranging extravagant trips.

The idea has been around for decades really. Most people have at least had the pleasure of indulging in a hotel concierge who can arrange daytrips, book theater tickets and call for dinner reservations. "What is new is the idea of bringing the concierge to mainstream America," says Katharine Giovanni, President and Co-founder of the *International Concierge and Errand Association (ICEA)*.

This new kind of personal helper has jumped out from behind the hotel lobby desk and jumped into your home. In recent years, personal concierge services have experienced unprecedented growth. Founded in 2001, the ICEA started small with just a few participants. Now there are over 600 members, from at least 20 countries. Why the rise? Time is the new luxury.

For \$5000 a year (chump change for some), you can be paired with one of the dedicated account managers from *Quintessentially*, a worldwide private members club and lifestyle management service, where clients can get almost anything taken care of. "Anything that's legal," according to Kody Gurfein the company's Head of Communications.

But, what does that really mean? "We have people who use us like a personal assistant—everything from finding flowers to 'I need a specific vintage scotch,'" says Kory Keith, one of the account managers for *Quintessentially*. In fact, requests can really run the gamut. Once, *Quintessentially* even arranged for a chauffeured car, stocked with oranges, to transport two sugar glider squirrels from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. Nuts, isn't it?

American Express offers a similar (though less personalized) service to its platinum card holders for just \$399 a year. According to their website, with one toll free phone call, the *Platinum Card Concierge* can help you with nearly any task, nearly anywhere in the world. Services include travel arrangements, hotel and restaurant reservations, and the purchase of hard-to-get theater tickets. That's right, front row seats to *Wicked* with just one phone call.

As helpful as having a round-the-clock concierge may be, a year-long commitment can be pricey, especially if you're just looking to take advantage of some smaller, less-involved services. Hourly personal concierges like *Metro West Concierge*, which caters to Central Massachusetts residents, can help you tackle the minutia of everyday life. For roughly \$30 per hour, you can hire Rose Colleran, founder of *Metro West concierge* to do online research, post information on Craigslist, find tutors for the kids, schedule lessons, and complete any other chore that's on your plate. "It gives my clients peace of mind to know that these things have been done for them and that they don't need to think about it anymore," says Colleran, whose business is focused on smaller errand type work.

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Other companies, like *GoodDeeds* of Wellesley, focus on longer-term, more in depth projects. "The business we are doing is at a much higher, more customized level," says Beth Miller, President of *GoodDeeds*, who for about \$95 per hour assists clients with more involved tasks, one of which included transporting a corpse to a small village in Italy, and then purchasing a mausoleum for it.

"You do a good job [for your clients], and then they kind of can't live without you," Miller says.

Case in point, Miller and her team recently arranged a three-month-long French sabbatical for their client Carroll Pierce. It took six months of planning and a series of weekly meetings. The staff of *GoodDeeds* procured travel visas for the Pierces, researched entry requirements for their dog, shipped ahead video recordings of their favorite TV shows, and even helped replace Mr. Pierce's passport after it suffered an

impromptu dip in the washing machine. "They basically became me while I was away," says Pierce. "They were better than me."

For more information on these services visit www.iceaweb.org, www.quintessentially.com, www.american-express.com, www.metrowestconcierge.com, and www.gooddeedsllc.com. CLM