



WORKING WITH HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Working in private households brings its own unique set of benefits and challenges that many are unaware of. Navigating the intricacies of communicating with your employers can sometimes feel like a full-time job itself, and when you add in additional members of household staff, learning the energy and pace of a household, how you fit into it, and what is expected of you (and what you can expect from your co-workers) can be overly complicated.

Whether you are considering moving to a more fully-staffed household in your next role, being asked to take on more household-management tasks, or are transitioning between household staffs of different sizes, we hope this guide will provide you with some clarity and assistance along the way.

Table of Contents

Defining Roles: Common Positions (include typical duties + responsibilities)

- Nanny
- Household manager / estate manager
- Executive assistant / personal assistant / chief of staff
- Family office and various functions
- Housekeeper / executive housekeeper
- Private chef
- Laundress
- Other: gardener, driver, groundskeeper, maintenance, security, etc

Different Styles of Household

- Formal (uniforms, sir/madam/mister/missus, weird things like that)
- Informal
- Combinations

Communication Within Staff

- Know who to ask which questions to
- Team mentality
- When to involve principals and when not to (or how to figure this out with a list of smart questions and conversations to have)
- How to set yourself up to graciously receive feedback
- Non-Violent Communication 101



Defining Roles: Common Positions

NANNY

A nanny is someone who is charged with overseeing the full care of children. They provide direct, hands-on care in the parents' absence or sometimes alongside as a support. Typical duties include meal planning and preparation, organizing toys and materials, laundry, seasonal rotation of clothes and toys, cleaning the children's areas, researching and planning activities, transporting children to events and scheduled playdates, and keeping on top of school work and school communications to the family. Nannies will often travel with family members and may be responsible for overnight care, activity planning, and safe transportation in foreign places. A nanny must first always be loving, kind, and genuinely invested in the wellbeing of the children they are caring for. In a way, this person is co-parenting with the principals. However, it is up to them to determine the direction of care and discipline for their children, and communicate that with the nanny; the ability to know when to lead and make decisions, and when to step back and defer to a child's parents is imperative. A nanny must be accommodating and flexible with their employers, highly organized, proactive, and approach the care holistically in order for the role to be most successful for everyone.

HOUSEHOLD OR ESTATE MANAGER

This position is responsible for maintaining the overall flow of the household or estate. Their duties typically include scheduling and receiving deliveries, construction and repairs, seasonal preparation and winterizing of properties, coordinating staff and managing ongoing projects. This person may often have light duties that are blended from a variety of all roles within the domestic realm; they may often find themselves chipping in with general tidying up, organizing the family members' belongings, running errands for the home or family, conducting interviews with temporary workers, and coordinating all communications between groundskeepers.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

This person assists an individual, or sometimes both principals, with their business affairs. This may include heavy scheduling of meetings, interviews, appointments, travel arrangements, communicating directly with other staff members and overseeing responsibilities that have been delegated to others, preparing and coordinating all materials needed for each event on the executive's calendar, and running an occasional errand or overseeing a business delivery. This person must be highly polished, professional, and represent their principal's business matters with a high level of excellence and attention to detail. Executive assistants often work long hours outside of the usual work day, being readily available to coordinate last-minute changes in the principal's schedule. The executive assistant is often the right hand of the executive, as well as their gatekeeper – they are the master of the executive's calendar and are charged with protecting their time well.



Defining Roles: Common Positions

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

This person assists an individual, or sometimes both principals within the home, with their personal affairs. The duties are similar to the Executive Assistant, however the matter of responsibilities require a different level of discretion. This may involve hiring or firing staff, scheduling travel and appointments, and creating reminders and preparing all necessary materials for the next event on the principal's calendar. The personal assistant role is often the right hand of the person they are working with, and as such, they are privy to a variety of personal information that the principal's own family may not be aware of. Therefore, it is the utmost importance that the personal assistant can manage and handle the activities and needs of the principal in a discrete and non-judgmental manner. Personal assistants are rarely advisors to the principal, but instead are to be readily available to handle the execution of what the principal deems necessary.

FAMILY OFFICE AND VARIOUS FUNCTIONS

Some households have a family office, which is generally a team of fractional or full-time accountants, administrators, financial advisors, and/or HR experts to handle payroll, employment agreements, scheduling, managing benefits for employees, assisting with PTO requests, candidate sourcing for open positions, and invoicing or handling other bills. In many cases, the family office is set up as an LLC separately from the family for ease and to access better benefit programs for their team of employees. In households without a family office, an estate manager, chief of staff, or high-level family assistant may perform some or all of the duties of a family office.

When working with a family office, it is important to learn up-front which needs and requests should be directed to which party to ensure the household runs smoothly. For example, the principles may want a daily or weekly update of activities that happened with their children throughout the day to peruse in their own time, but they may not be the best person to let know when the family is about to run out of milk, when a car needs serviced, or what an electrician happened to mention next steps are on a large-scale renovation project. While training in a fully-staffed household, it is important to have one main point of contact to go to with questions big and small while you continue to settle into your role and the household.

HOUSEKEEPER

This person is responsible for maintaining the cleanliness and organization of the principal's home. This includes deep cleaning all areas of the home, including but not limited to bathrooms, bedrooms, kitchen, living room, office, and exterior lounge spaces, and often the laundering of all bed linens and/or clothing items.



Defining Roles: Common Positions

HOUSEKEEPER

If the housekeeper is the only staff managing the flow of the home, they may also be responsible for some managerial tasks and errands, such as package delivery and drop-off, grocery shopping, and charge of dry cleaning. Full-time housekeepers are often charged with planning and executing seasonal cleanings, as well as preparing for guests and large gatherings the family hosts. In these cases, a housekeeper may also be required to assist with maintaining the tidiness of events and cleaning up afterward. A housekeeper must be meticulous, forward-thinking, organized, and take strong initiative to make sure all areas are left to a high-level of cleanliness at the end of each day. They must also be savvy with all manners of cleaning, and find solutions to problems in the event their cleaning skill lacks in one particular area.

EXECUTIVE HOUSEKEEPER

This role takes on more responsibility than a traditional housekeeper. In addition to the duties and skills listed above, they may also oversee a team of housekeepers, organizing and dividing up duties while managing the completion of daily and seasonal tasks for the home. Alternatively, they may be skilled in other aspects of homecare, such as meal planning and preparation, silver polishing, ironing and specialty care of linens, clothing repair, serving and assisting during formal dinners and gatherings, and cleaning of outdoor materials and areas. This person typically has years of experience as a housekeeper before they are promoted to this position.

PRIVATE EDUCATOR OR TUTOR

A private educator or tutor role can vary greatly based on the needs of the family and the capabilities of the educator. It can be a short-term or long-term position, and can provide either supplemental educational support to a child's existing school, full educational support in lieu of traditional school, or subject-specific teaching and tutoring. Professional educators may also be tasked with researching appropriate materials or curriculum to utilize with each child, or creating an academic map and sequence for the school-year. In households with smaller staff, it is not uncommon for a private educator who is guaranteed a full-time schedule to take on a few additional responsibilities that are usually considered nanny responsibilities (such as preparing and serving simple meals for children, transporting them to and from activities or lessons, and maintaining tidiness of the children's environment.) If you are working as a nanny in a home with a private educator, or as a private educator in a home with a nanny, it is important to understand and delineate where responsibilities will fall to ensure you are aware of the expectations in your role!



Defining Roles: Common Positions

PRIVATE CHEF

This person is hired to take full charge of a family's meal planning, shopping, and food preparation. Depending on the schedule and hours reserved per week, this person may take the lead on all meals and snacks every day, or only a few per week. They are responsible for acquiring all foods necessary for each recipe, and full clean up of their preparation space and materials in a manner that preserves the longevity of all appliances and cookware. A private chef may collaborate on a menu for as much or as little as desired by their employer. This position is especially helpful for families with multiple dietary restrictions or allergenic concerns. A private chef must be comfortable with taking a lot of direction and last minute direction from their employer, which is opposite of running a kitchen in a restaurant. This person must not be easily rattled, able to handle frustrations, complaints, changes, and feedback with grace and acceptance. They must also be organized and disciplined, and quick on their feet if there are last minute guests added to the table, or food reserved for meals turns out to be missing or gone bad.

LAUNDRESS

This position is most often open in private homes with many members in the family or on staff. This person's job is strictly to clean and organize the linens of the home. This person ensures all bedsheets, clothing items, table settings, and other linens are always tidy, stain-free, and ironed and organized in a clean manner, stored safely to avoid environmental damage such as moths, mold, and sun damage. They also stay on top of all dry cleaning, including arranging pick-ups and drop-offs. This person must be meticulous, organized, communicative, and forward-thinking to anticipate clothing items that may be needed with little to no notice. They must also handle stress well, and have the integrity to acknowledge when items may have had a mishap. Paying attention to the details of the calendar and schedule for all family members is essential in order to prepare the clothing items needed in advance.

CHIEF OF STAFF

This position is often created in homes where there are more than 5 employees to oversee. This person will sometimes fill the HR type role in the home, fielding day-off requests, coordinating and dividing labor on a team member's sick-day or extended leave period, and working out any interpersonal issues among staff members. The Chief of Staff is often responsible for conducting interviews and orchestrating all training for new hires, employment reviews, performance meetings and redirection, and ultimately handling termination, all with guidance and direction first from the principals.



Defining Roles: Common Positions

CHIEF OF STAFF

This person also strategizes for seasonal and temporary hiring. It is crucial that this person maintains a high level of personal organization, integrity, impartiality, discretion, and a level head, as well as wisdom when making decisions that are in line with what will best help the family.

DRIVER

This person provides personalized transportation to the principals in their vehicle. This role is often determined necessary when the principal has a high-profile job and is in need of extra security, or a highly unpredictable schedule and needs round-the-clock coverage, or has a high amount of meetings with other high-profile people and wants to arrive in style. Other times, the individual may simply like to be driven around to remove an element of stress during commuting from their daily lives, allowing them to conduct business or rest on the go. In addition to executing safe and reliable transportation for the principal's affairs, a driver is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the vehicle, as well as its safe storage. Drivers must be highly experienced in the handling of luxury vehicles, and knowledgeable about all routes possible within their location to provide alternates when in a pinch. They must also be organized to schedule and take the car into the shop for routine maintenance, and be attentive to any possible issues that may be in need of repair. Strong communication skills and a high level of discretion are necessary, as a driver will potentially overhear a variety of the principal's personal affairs. This individual must also be attentive to detail, maintaining the overall cleanliness and appearance of the vehicle between wash and detailing appointments. Above all, they must maintain a high level of professionalism and personal pride in their work, as they are representing their employer at all locations.

GROUNDSKEEPER

This person is responsible for the upkeep of the outside of the home or estate. They provide continued hands-on care and repairs when supplies or areas are out of order or are in need of pruning, detailing, or winterizing. They oversee the planning and executive of seasonal planting and decorating, communicating and coordinating with gardeners, supply persons, decorators, and nurseries, often securing the items necessary for project completion. Groundskeepers also provide daily and weekly maintenance of the property, either by outsourcing and delegating, or completing the work themselves.



Defining Roles: Common Positions

GROUNDSKEEPER

These individuals must be highly experienced and knowledgeable about a variety of plants and the hardiness zone of the home. They may or may not have formal training from an accredited location, but will demonstrate a longevity and history within their field. This person must have an attention to detail, be highly organized and forward thinking, and able to communicate between various parties to ensure the grounds are kept at top notch level during all seasons.

MAINTENANCE

Similar to the groundskeeper, this person is responsible for the upkeep of all technical and mechanical systems inside and outside of the home or estate. They provide continued hands-on attention and repairs when areas are out of order or are in need of repair, such as plumbing, electrical, and general contract work. They oversee the planning and executive of seasonal preparation and repairs, and when necessary, communicate and coordinate with experts in areas who possess deeper knowledge than the individual when specific problems arrive. Maintenance employees also provide daily and weekly checks and preservation of the home and estate, either by outsourcing and delegating, or completing the work themselves, depending on their skillset. These individuals must be highly experienced and knowledgeable about a variety of common repairs and construction, as well as possess the wisdom to hire the best contractors for larger projects and necessary repairs as they arise. They often will have formal training from an accredited body in some capacity and will be able to demonstrate a basic competency in general repairs and oversight. While the specific skills and strengths that are required are set by each principal, depending on the estate's needs, this person must always have an attention to detail, be highly organized and able to anticipate repairs or preservations beforehand, and able to facilitate the repairs and winterizing of various items and areas of the home to ensure the home is kept in working condition with minimal interruptions. Depending on the level of staffing within the home, this person may be required to run errands and procure supplies to help ease transitions related to unforeseen failures in machinery and the last-minute interruptions this causes to the family's life.

PERSONAL SECURITY

Often for high-profile or high-net worth individuals, this person or team surrounds the principal and/or their family members at the direction of the principal. This may be limited to when the family is traveling from place to place, or may include protection on the perimeter of the property or home.



Defining Roles: Common Positions

PERSONAL SECURITY

These individuals may or may not be armed, and depending on this requirement, may need to have a demonstrated track record of safe firearms training, licensure, and ownership. They may be required to keep on top of the laws within their area, and organize any necessary steps for renewal, including continued training. Therefore, this individual must be highly organized with their personal affairs. They must also be quick on their feet, executing swift and sound judgement to assess potential threats, disruptions, or annoyances. All individuals on a personal security team must be highly discreet, able to seamlessly fade into the background while providing a level of comfort, often going unnoticed. This individual must be comfortable protecting the family by any means necessary, unafraid of confrontation, yet knowing how to defuse potentially delicate situations or evacuate family members to safety within a moment's notice.

Different Styles of Household

FORMAL

This style of household typically occurs in very fully staffed homes of high-net worth individuals. Because of the constant number of individuals present inside and outside of the home or estate, family and friends need to be able to quickly identify who is an authorized person. A way to ensure this distinction is easily available is by implementing a dress code or uniforms for staff members. These codes may vary depending on which classification of worker each person is (example: childcare, groundskeeping team, home maintenance, housekeeping, security, managerial roles). In formal homes, the principals and/or family and friends may be referred to by Sir, Madam, Ma'am, Mister, Misses, Miss. It is important for all staff members to match the high level of professionalism and formal environment, only bringing their personal perspective or beliefs to their job if called upon. Most all formal homes take care of their staff very well, with many principals taking the level of care for their staff as a reflection of who they are personally, and the values they hold true. These jobs often come with high salaries, full benefits, transportation and high-quality, healthy meals provided while on duty. With these perks also comes an unspoken level of indebtedness that may workers experience at some point in time. A team-mentality, pitch-in attitude, positive spirit, polished appearance, and high level of discretion and professionalism are expected to be maintained by staff at all times.



Different Styles of Household

INFORMAL

The style of household typically is much more laid back where staff members are more autonomous and have a more personal level of connectivity with each other. The number of staff members is often unrelated to how this household functions: as in all jobs, the principals set the tone and lead by example their desired balance of professionalism and personal boundaries. In informal households, principals may ask staff members about their personal lives and exhibit genuine care and concern for their well being outside of work. These households may often keep duties fluid and expect a level of flexibility in duties, depending on the amount of staff members and roles that are filled. Families may see their employees as peers and over time, begin to treat them as friends. It is important in these homes to follow the principals' lead, but find a style of communication where one's own basic needs and hesitations can be conveyed respectfully and clearly, in a manner that does not damage the informal nature of the relationship.

COMBINATIONS

It is rare for a home to fall strictly within the Informal or Formal box. When starting a new job, it is always best to err on the side of formal and professional, keeping private life out of your work environment. Once boundaries are displayed, it's important for employees to reflect back their own expectations to the principals. At the start, it is best for each individual to create a mental "hard stop" of boundary lines in regards to their personal behavior, speech, and actions: for example, considering how staff and principals interact and share together when in conversation, recreational activities, political and familial discussions, and troubleshooting problems. From time to time, households will move between both styles depending on a number of factors – personal or familial issues, interpersonal issues with staff, high turnover or poor performance, or general emotional unawareness or control of one's self. Therefore, it is imperative that the professional maintain an awareness if and when the household shifts from one side to the other, and notice which situations require a more formal or informal approach. If shifts happen rapidly, it is often beneficial to address the changes noticed in the environment, and ask what can be done to support the home better, or communicate with respectful assertiveness what feels uncomfortable or inappropriate within this new change.



Communication Within Staff

A team is only as solid as its weakest member. A team is only as strong as its communication. Knowing this, all team members must have a personal commitment to elevating and improving their style, being aware of their strengths and sore spots. Interpersonal communication and discussions of sensitive matters should always be done in a manner described as “Nonviolent”. In this approach, we learn to recognize and identify our own deeper needs in the moment of sticky situations. This helps the individual to take a step back, calmly assess the situation, and respectfully respond to the other party. Nonviolent communication puts the emphasis on finding common ground while clearly conveying one’s perspective in a manner that is neither dismissive, domineering, or blaming. By exercising this communication style, each individuals’ well-being is at the center of our speech, allowing for an easier path forward through perceived and demonstrable conflicts.

Here are our best tips for ensuring seamless, nonviolent communication is encouraged and fostered between all staff members.

Understand and embody the team mentality.

To be a part of a staffed team means that you always have access to support when needed. It’s also expected that you reciprocate this help, too. While each person’s job title and roles are clearly defined, there is often an expectation of some fluidity and ability to take on the tasks of someone else when they are in a pinch. It’s important to know the balance of offering to help and remembering that you are accountable for managing your job’s primary responsibilities while taking care of yourself within the hours you are on duty. Employees who routinely say, “That’s not my job,” do not last long within a private home.

Know who to go to for answers to certain questions.

While the principal in the home always has the final say on all decisions, on a fully-staffed team, they have hired people to make certain choices and execute appropriate actions on their behalf. When you begin employment on a new team, observe who completes what tasks around the home. Ask your direct supervisor or co-workers who would have the information you need when a problem or question arises. Above all, when there is confusion about a process, procedure, or situation, don’t assume the decision is yours alone to make. Confer with other team members before acting, and only seek clarification from the principal once you have generated solutions together with others.



Communication Within Staff

Sharpen your ability to accept feedback gracefully, yet discern when and when not to involve supervisors.

When it comes to working in an environment with a high level of stress and responsibility, it is crucial to remember that so few things are personal to the individual. It can be challenging to recall this in the moment, particularly when one's own performance or approach is being scrutinized. We all have room to improve, and we all make mistakes or do things that may inadvertently hurt or offend someone. To be able to hear and receive feedback, and decipher what is true and happening in the moment, it's important to ask yourself a few questions:

- **"What emotion am I experiencing at this exact moment?"**
 - Don't be afraid of an awkward pause in conversation. Identifying how you feel and labelling it (verbally or mentally) helps to distance yourself from it, creating a safe container for it, thereby enabling you to see the problem outside of yourself - hearing the speaker's words for what they actually are, rather than the effect they have on you.

- **"Am I able to respond to this person now, or must I insist for time to evaluate?"**
 - If you cannot exercise calm, nonviolent communication that equally honors yourself and your perspective, it is perfectly acceptable to say, "Now is not a good time for me to discuss this. I will take this and think on it, and we can pick a time to connect soon. Before I go, I just want to clarify beforehand, you are saying..." and then restate what was spoken.
 - When you are in a solid headspace and able to receive feedback, devote time to hearing the content of the words, sorting through what rings true, what is possibly true, and what is demonstrably false. If not in the moment, plan a time to reopen the conversation once you are calm. Affirm the person's concerns as real, that you hear them, and your plan to do better in the future, or the ways you see things from a different light.



Communication Within Staff

- If ever a conversation starts or begins to transition into personal attacks, hyperbolized accusations, or the volume increases, it is time to end the conversation immediately and revisit when everyone is mentally in a more level-headed place.
- **Once the conversation is over, ask yourself, “Are there any patterns of inappropriate communication happening with this person?”**
 - After you’ve had time to reflect on your needs and what the speaker was really trying to convey, it’s important to notice any potential patterns of communication that are misaligned with the team mentality. Is everyone able to accept some responsibility for the situation, seeing things as they are actually happening and without gaslighting one another? Is everyone able to come together, unified in their resolve to do better next time? Does everyone feel respected and valued as a person, or is this respect withheld and only distributed based on the merit and quality of one’s labor?
 - Continued patterns of misaligned must be addressed directly with the individuals if at all possible. Oftentimes, the person is simply not able to see their role in the dynamic or conflict. At this point, it is crucial to set up a time in the near future to discuss this problem directly with your supervisor, either independently, or with the person present.

Speech that is threatening in nature, whether personal safety or blackmail, should always be brought to the attention of your supervisor as soon as possible.

Communication Within Staff

Practice Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence.

In an ideal work environment, all people on the team possess the ability to respond to one another with grace, trust, and clarity, rather than high-emotional outbursts, accusations, or rash decisions. This place is the most successful and healthy area for all team members to grow and be fulfilled in their work.

Mindfulness plays a large role in one's own emotional intelligence. The practice of mindfulness is to simply notice how you are feeling physically and emotionally at any given time, and to be fully mentally present with, and attentive to, where your body is in space. This is very important when completing tasks that have high-stakes attached, or when having an intense conversation. When practicing mindfulness, a person is able to stay engaged with a hard topic or task and not lose track of what they are doing or route the conversation into areas that are easier to discuss as an avoidance tactic. By exercising mindfulness, it becomes easier to be aware of your own patterns and automatic reactions, and how they may be helping or hurting you and your time. This helps build your emotional intelligence.

Individuals who have a high level of emotional intelligence provide a strong stability and consistency to their daily interactions. This simply means an individual is able to see situations as they are, able to control their own emotions in a calm, diplomatic manner, and respond with wisdom rather than react with intense emotional outbursts. A person with high emotional intelligence is not flat or robotic, either. On the contrary, they are able to read and feel the emotions that arise in the moment between all parties present, and then balance their understanding when deciding upon the next best steps, even when that action is to take a break and revisit the conversation should a decision not be able to be reached.

Being a team member who communicates with a high level of emotional intelligence will bring unity, kindness, and harmony to your work environment. You and others will be able to tackle hard topics or uncomfortable situations with understanding and calm, helping to preserve the team mentality and overall flow of the home.