

A Housekeeper Is Cheaper Than a Divorce: Why You Can Afford to Hire Help and How to Get It

Kathy Fitzgerald Sherman

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Anne Morrow Lindbergh labeled them the “vacationless class.” They’re the wives and mothers stuck with housekeeping duties—averaging a full shift of thirty-five hours or more every week of unpaid household labor to their husband’s almost nine hours.

A former statistic herself, Sherman was tired of juggling the demands of career, childcare, and housekeeping and of yearning for someone like Alice on *The Brady Bunch* to fight on her side in the “chore wars.” Realizing that delegating more work to her husband was “an impossible fantasy” (one in ten couples actually separate over housekeeping issues), Sherman used her management skills as a computer industry professional to develop a straightforward, foolproof guide to hiring and managing a housekeeper.

The book illustrates that hired help is less a luxury than a time-management tool for overburdened women that ultimately benefits the entire family. In Part I of her well-organized book, she “examines and explodes the taboos against hiring help,” noting that today’s women spend as much time on housework as did their mothers as a result of higher standards from new technology, larger houses, more gadgets, and the “job of consumption” itself. She also dismisses the idea that hiring help is a moral issue when it should be nothing more than a “mutually rewarding business relationship.”

Sherman leaves no sponge unturned in “demystifying” all aspects of employee management once the decision to hire has been made and the family budget adjusted. In Part II, she provides a blueprint for the process including how to advertise for a housekeeper and develop a training plan, how to screen employees and check references, and how to make sense of the “nanny” laws and tax forms.

Throughout the book are checklists and sample forms boxed-off from the main text that can be used or copied, such as a pay stub, a master shopping list and a copy of Sherman’s own housekeeper instruction booklet listing daily and “as needed tasks.” Also included are “housekeeper-friendly” recipes and a list of invaluable resources including phone numbers for tax information and web addresses for on-line grocery shopping.

In addition to easing resentment between a husband and wife and allowing a mom to be a “teller of stories, not a sorter of socks,” hiring a housekeeper also allows time for women to explore new opportunities. As the author herself says, “What could we be contributing, to ourselves and to society, if we weren’t doing housework?” The answer to that remains the best reason for enacting the plan set forth in these pages.

JUDY HOPKINS (September / October 2000)

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