

Houseplants need watering? Get a private secretary

Britain's cash-rich, time-poor professionals are increasingly turning to personal 'lifestyle managers' to take care of the mundane details of their personal lives. **Nicholas Pyke** reports

They already rely on a multinational army of cleaners, nannies and au pairs. Now, Britain's harassed professionals are turning to the private secretary, a figure once confined to the pages of Victorian fiction.

Thousands of office workers have already paid up to £35 an hour for private help with tasks ranging from opening the mail to fixing romantic dates. A series of rival agencies has now

emerged and, last week, the leader in the field, Buy:time, which operates in London and the Home Counties, announced plans to expand nationwide.

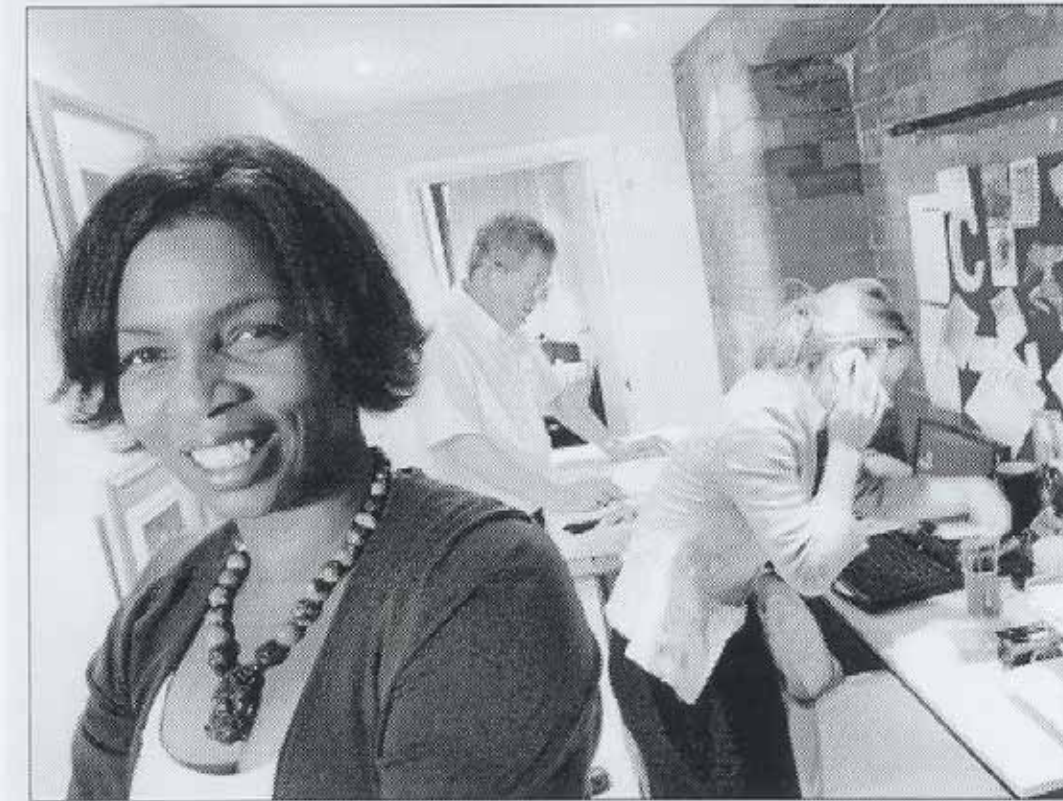
Claire Brynteson, founder of Buy:time, said her "lifestyle man-

agers" carry out an extraordinary range of tasks. They have bought houses, fixed iPods, collected dry cleaning and arranged children's birthday parties, she said. Most common of all are requests to find and let in plumbers and electricians.

"We are seeing a real demand for personal secretarial work," she said. "Some of it is from the larger property owners who just can't keep up with the workload involved in running a large home.

"They are asking us to take away administrative and menial tasks such as responding to invitations to social events, organising pick-ups for children, filing, paying bills and errand-running.

"But it's also geared towards the 30-something single bloke: having a girl running around doing things sounds ideal. Initially I thought it would be much more male-orientated as women aren't so good at letting go of things. In fact we



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Connie Jackson, 44, is the chief executive of a charitable foundation in London. She hired a domestic secretary after realising she was too busy to open her own post. Now she pays for Clare Malins, 28 (pictured above right, with Ms Jackson), to help out at home for one morning a week.

"It's great, particularly for single

women. I was so busy I had no time for my own thing. It was the small jobs that were mounting up and getting to me - like dying from a thousand little cuts. I was working 12-13 hour days and just got desperate. At one point, I had a cheque bounce even though I had a cheque three times the amount in a pile of unopened post at home. I thought,

'I've got to get my life organised' and rang for help. Originally it was going to be a one-time thing. But it's evolved and now Clare is like my extra five hours a week. She's helped me set up my office at home. She does my post. She helped me set up my iPod. She does everything I wanted to do but didn't have the mental energy for. She's almost like my wife."

have almost as many women as men using us."

"Concierge" companies, which arrange solutions at the end of the phone, are already well established in Britain. Many have contracts with major corporations. They, too, are reporting a demand for personal secretarial work.

A spokeswoman for Ten, which became the first

concierge company in the UK said: "Around one in 20 of our inquiries has always been for personal secretarial work, so the demand has increased. The trend of life is busy."

Clare Malins, from Buy:time, is one of the new breed of domestic fixers. She has around 30 clients, 10 of whom she sees regularly, including David Lenigas, a

company MD from Chelsea. He books Clare for 20 hours a week. "I have a PA at work and, effectively, a PA outside work," he said. "She manages all my non-work issues. I have just moved house, for example. She managed that. I wouldn't be able to do what I do if she didn't help."

Allison Elliott, a 36-year-old from Islington, north Lon-

don, uses a rival company, Cushion the Impact. She said: "If I'm away, I'll say 'can you drop in and check that there's nothing urgent, see if the plants need watering'. If I decide that I want to have a dinner party, they'll find me someone to cater."

Additional reporting by Andrew Johnson

Legal move to make EU publish GM test results

BY GEOFFREY LEAN
Environment Editor

Two legal initiatives are to be launched to force European bureaucrats to make public secret research on the effects of feeding GM corn to rats whose results were exclusively revealed in *The Independent on Sunday*.

This week, in separate moves, a British pressure group is to approach the European ombudsman, and a former French environment minister is to write to the European Court to ask it to lift the cloak of confidentiality from a 1,139-page report by the biotech giant Monsanto which showed that rats fed modified corn had smaller kidneys and raised levels of white blood cells compared to those who ate a similar non-GM one.

The results have raised fears that human health might also be at risk from the corn which the EU is expected to approve for sale this year.

Prof Gilles-Eric Seralini, professor of molecular biology at the University of Caen who scrutinises the safety of GM products for the EC, told *The Independent on Sunday* last week that he found the research results "very worrying".

He is president of the Scientific Council of the French Committee for Independent Research and Information on Genetics, which has been trying to get the research made public for 18 months.

Monsanto claims to have published "all the relevant safety information" in a 1-page report in December 2002, but while asserting that the rats "responded similarly" to GM and non-GM food it contains no detailed data: