

FMLIFE

TIME MANAGEMENT

Buying back time

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Too busy to cook, let alone shop? The concept of having a lifestyle manager is catching on among busy executives, writes Jacqui Pile

Here's a solution for time-pressed executives: the lifestyle manager. Described as a cross between a personal assistant and a 1950s housewife, this new breed of personal concierge will whip up a dinner for 10 at your home, get you invited to a star-studded film premiere, remind you about your anniversary or stock your fridge with your favourite brand of mineral water. Part social adviser, confidential secretary and even handyman, there are few limits to what a lifestyle manager won't do.

Overseas, the industry has taken off — and not just among the super-wealthy

and celebrities.

Alex Cheatle, the CEO of TenUK, one of the biggest British lifestyle management companies, says having a lifestyle manager will soon seem as natural as having a GP. The company has raised the benchmark in personal service. It has provided one client with advice on how his son could prepare for university interviews, suggested Tantric sex teachers for failing marriages and tracked down breakdancing teachers for MTV-mad teenagers.

In SA, though the concept of having a lifestyle manager has taken longer to

catch on, small agencies are popping up to meet the demand.

"Working professionals, who understand the value of their time, are buying into the idea," says The Desk MD Carole Day. "Once they've had this type of back-up, there's no going back."

She says requests from clients can be as small as finding a pet hamster for a child or as big as organising an around-the-world trip for a family, along with finding an au pair or caterer, or even hiring a yacht.

Day adds that trust between lifestyle manager and client is essential. "We have access to some clients' bank accounts to be able to pay their bills, so confidentiality is central to the way we work."

Companies have also started offering

personal concierge memberships to their executives as a perk. "It helps bring down absenteeism and improve productivity because directors aren't distracted by personal admin," says Day.

Clearly the fees are not for everyone — a block of eight hours costs R2 400 and unlimited memberships can soar over the R100 000 mark, though it is possible to buy the services by the hour.

But these are not just companies that pick up the dry-cleaning or drop the dog at the vet; they offer a highly personalised service.

Owner of My Life Organised (MLO) Caro Fisher says requests range from the mundane to the extraordinary. One client wanted the company to investigate the possibility of rescuing a mistreated lion in a zoo in Eastern Europe and re-locating it to SA.

"We've done everything from sorting e-mails and filing to buying quirky personal gifts," says Fisher.

Most requests revolve around the home, adds MLO's Jo'burg partner, Ciska Thurman. This means stepping in to meet contractors at a client's home, organising events — such as Christmas dinners or children's parties — and sorting out bills.

"These are professionals who can't step out of the office during the day to wait around for a Telkom repairman," she says.

The Desk's and MLO's client bases are made up mostly of working professionals — women who return to work after maternity leave, bachelors who travel a lot and male married executives whose partners work too.

Both also serve "swallows", people who live abroad but own SA properties, which they visit once or twice a year. Both The Desk and MLO take care of all aspects of maintenance of the house while the owner is away and ensure that it's fully stocked and serviced

Hetty Zantman



Carole Day

Hetty Zantman



Caro Fisher

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— CAROLE DAY

when they're around, too.

The big difference, of course, between the UK and SA is that most people are able to afford domestic help.

"Many of our clientele will have a personal assistant at work and a housekeeper at home," says Thurman. "But a PA shouldn't be collecting dry-cleaning and housekeepers perhaps aren't appropriate to be paying the bills. Clients ask us to do the tasks they feel uncomfortable delegating to their existing staff."

Thurman, who describes herself as being obsessively organised and logistically

minded, personally assesses clients in their homes to get a better idea of how they work and their personal taste.

One of MLO's clients, corporate actuary at Hannover Re Susan Atkinson, had a to-do list that ran longer than two pages. As a busy executive, she found that she just couldn't get to the things that needed fixing, stocking, sorting and filing at home.

"I had all kinds of individual, personal things that I needed to do which were never quite urgent enough to prioritise ahead of my work commitments."

Atkinson hired MLO to help her tackle the list — and hasn't looked back.

"I've finally started doing things I've always wanted to do, but haven't had the time for," she says. "I felt we could start the renovations we had wanted to make years ago."

These boutique operators share the market with larger lifestyle management companies such as Quintessentially, a UK-based firm with offices in Cape Town

IT'S SORTED

- *Weekly grocery shopping, including unpacking: R250 (1-2 hours)
- *Personalised gift shopping for the family: R600 (3 hours)
- *Sorting out incorrect municipal bill: R400 (2 hours)
- *Organising dinner party for 10, including menu choice, shopping and recipes – all delivered ready to prepare: R400 (1-2 hours)
- *Pick-up and delivery of prescriptions: R100 (half an hour)

The above was provided by My Life Organised

and Jo'burg, which has been operating here since 2004.

Quintessentially prides itself on its connections. Need direct access to a famous artist, designer or musician? They'll organise. An invitation to the Cannes Film Festival, Elton John's white-tie-and-tiara ball? Consider it done. But, be warned, memberships start at R7 500/year and go up to R270 000.

On the elite packages clients have access to personal account managers in the 45 countries in which Quintessentially operates.

"We build up a database on each client, which means we know how many children you have, what type of theatre shows you enjoy, even whether you're allergic to shellfish," she says.

Though the company isn't as focused on the domestic sphere as The Desk and MLO, Quintessentially SA MD Sarah McGrath says clients receive preferential rates due to the company's relationships with the best laundries, tailors, wardrobe advisers, life coaches, caterers and other linchpins of the efficient household.

As lifestyle management evolves, more companies are likely to develop specialist advice. TenUK, for example, has recently launched a "green" concierge service to advise clients on how to make their home more energy-efficient, sourcing the most environmentally friendly car or putting together an environmentally aware holiday.

At the moment, these services may seem decadent and unnecessary, especially in tough economic times. But as the work pace gets more frenetic, it's a small step towards achieving that elusive work-life balance.

As Fisher puts it: "It's about helping clients buy back time." ■

BOOKS - 1

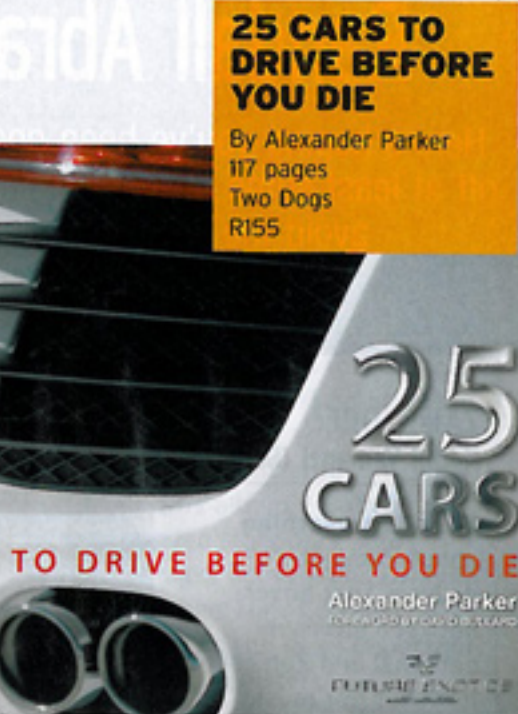
Motorvation

Why 25? Why not 50? Or 100? Or ... The trouble with personal compilations is that they are just that: personal. Anyone who loves cars will have favourites.

With only 25 to choose from, odds are you will disagree fundamentally with this selection from Parker, motoring editor of *FHM* and *The Weekender*. For example, I don't think the Land Rover Sport or Opel Astra OPC belong in the company of the Rolls-Royce Phantom, Aston Martin DB9 and Birkin S3. Why no Morgan?

Then again, who cares what I think? We all have our own ideas of automotive perfection. It's what makes motoring such fun.

Parker offers snapshot alternatives to



25 CARS TO DRIVE BEFORE YOU DIE

By Alexander Parker
117 pages
Two Dogs
R155

each of his picks. Even if you disagree with his final 25, there's no arguing with his passion or knowledge. The pictures are pretty good, too. **David Furlonger**

BOOKS - 2

Mind your business

The latest in *The Economist's* series of useful business books provides a comprehensive yet concise overview of the most influential management concepts and significant business thinkers of the past century.

The first half of the book contains summaries of leading management ideas such as the "Balanced Scorecard", "Com-

petitive Advantage", "Management by Walking About", "Quality Circles", "Scenario Planning", "Six Sigma" and the like.

The second half summarises the works of more than 50 famous business thinkers.

Ideas and gurus sometimes overlap. Peter Drucker heads the list of influential thinkers, which is dominated by Americans and adopted Americans and includes the "Famous Five" of Drucker, Douglas McGregor, Michael Porter, Alfred Sloan and Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Modern Japanese and Indian gurus such as Akio Morita and C K Prahalad are included – so, too, are the likes of Charles Handy, Steven Covey and Warren Buffett.

The purpose of this book is to lead the interested reader, via the short bibliographies attached to many entries, to further examination of the best in business theory.

Refreshingly free of the mumbo-jumbo that often passes for business wisdom, this book is both a valuable source of reference and an enlightening read. **Richard Steyn**

GUIDE TO MANAGEMENT IDEAS AND GURUS

By Tim Hindle
322 pages
Economist/Profile Books
R399

Guide to Management Ideas and Gurus

