

# PRIVATE MATTERS

## *Service as a Relationship*

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Much has been written about privacy in the workplace. But, very little, if anything, has been written about privacy when the workplace is in someone's personal space. Household service, private employment - whatever you want to call it - has existed for a long time and its recognition as a legitimate subject of study is long overdue.

Years of working with household employers and employees have given me insight into some of the difficulties that exist in the service relationship. Issues involving privacy seem to be challenging,

for both parties, to recognize and address.

Privacy is a treasured and necessary part of anyone's life and understanding privacy in the context of a working relationship is a fundamental element of the private service relationship.

Inside the employer's private space, secrets are often revealed: arguments, indiscretions, and real character

vulnerabilities are exposed. Employees will naturally feel uncomfortable in such a situation and this may have an impact on job performance. Professional staff must recognize the implication of their physical presence in someone else's private domain. How should employees handle themselves in such circumstances?

One way would be to retreat, out of earshot, giving the family their 'space' and showing respect for privacy. Another way would be to make clear that no judgments or opinions are being made about the employer's household and home space matters. As Steven Ferry recommends in his book, *The British Butler's Bible* (Mansion Publishing, 2001), household professionals "should never be opinionated or judgmental, rather preferring to put all parties as much at ease as the situation will allow." If taken, this advice helps to create and maintain a professional attitude.

The employer and family should also understand that they are sacrificing some privacy for the convenience and necessity of having a staff. When all of the players in the household recognize and understand the privacy

issues, then the system runs well. Service is delivered with pleasure and the family receives service with ease.

I am in the process of writing extensively about these and other issues related to privacy and household employment.

Thoughts on 'territoriality', 'circles of intimacy', 'the need for privacy and how you can tell', 'employee privacy' and more are coming. I hope that you will enjoy and learn from these observations and I welcome your comments.



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