



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN BUTLERS

Promoting Service Standards through Training
in Staffed Homes, Luxury Hotels, Resorts and Spas

The Institute is dedicated to raising service standards in private estates and the hospitality industry by broadly disseminating the mindset and skills of that time-honored quintessential service provider, the British Butler, adapted to the needs of modern employers and guests.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

by Steven Ferry

STAYING TRUE EVEN WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

In the current sparse business climate, where creativity must be applied to find positions and generate income, I fear some are resorting to short cuts and other less-than-honest-and-upright stratagems. This kind of behavior is frowned on in any profession; in ours, where the highest standards define the profession, it is surely not acceptable at all. Is it not an oxymoron (a contradiction in terms) to talk of an “unethical butler” (or household manager)? If we, as butlers, do not maintain our standards, then we have no profession left, just a tired public relations gimmick and a confidence trick. We can do something about this simply by deciding to.

Let me be specific. A member of IAPSP recently alerted its president, Mr. David Bertnick, to the web site for *General Quarters Academy of Household Management*. Mr. Bertnick asked if the Institute knew of it, as they had linked to the IIMB web site. One glance told us they were not what they claimed to be. Further investigation by Mr. Bertnick showed that *General Quarters* “politely and frankly diverted attention away from the crucial questions of where their offices were located, who owned the business, and who some of their qualified and experienced trainers might be.”

In a similar vein is what we refer to as the Institute’s “little Battle in China”...somebody there, while pretending to be located in London, England, had copied the entirety of the IIMB web site, even down to the color and font. That’s pretty extreme in terms of identity and intellectual property theft, but as the only link for possible theft-of-mones from unsuspecting customers was an email address that went nowhere, it seemed more of a curious inconvenience than an effort to defraud. However, it took persistence and

the assistance of Ms. Wendy Leutert, who speaks Chinese and happened to be in Beijing, to put enough pressure on the Chinese ISP to remove the offending web site—so maybe we were able to stop it before it became too serious.

The Institute is used to being copied, used to being undersold at fees that only serve the seller, not the industry – because they lower pay scales and perceived value, all for self-defeating, short-term gain. Perhaps it would be more encouraging if this particular competitor at least had changed the wording of the Institute’s services being copied, instead of simply cutting and pasting whole paragraphs at a time; or in other ways ceased taking advantage of the Institute’s largesse without the courtesy of a request or acknowledgement. While perhaps expected in a cutthroat world, this is hardly an appropriate business practice for a profession that prides itself in having the highest ethical standards.

We have seen certain entities expecting butlers to work for a pittance (inadequate payment). Pandering (to do exactly what another wants, especially when it is not acceptable, to obtain a personal advantage) to such a demand merely devalues the profession and makes it difficult for a butler to do more than tread water financially. We are not advocating inflated salaries any more than we want to see a return to 19th century “keep them in their place” wages. There *is* a happy and fair medium, however.

We have seen some schools continuing to promote their classes without making clear that a good many of their past students are still looking for work—an unhappy situation to find oneself in, having spent 2-3 months of one’s time and all one’s capital. Good for the school, perhaps? I think you’ll agree I don’t need to answer that.

Which brings me to the latest issue that has chanced across my desk. A few months

ago, the Institute was asked to co-sponsor a convention. While we had misgivings, given the reputation in our industry of the other organization involved - including two court cases in recent years, involving alleged violence by the principal— we decided that the industry needed to be brought together, not fractured (divided); and that everyone deserves a second chance. The Institute had nothing to gain from this relationship, and assisted in making the event a success, according to the principal.

During the preparations for this very conference, to which we had encouraged our membership and clients to go (and quite a few did), that same organization posted reviews of my hotel butler book on Amazon.com: “*1 out of 5 stars Yawn! Boring and Pretentious...*[name of the reviewer’s employer and book title deleted] *is a 100 times more informative and exciting than this outdated bore*” and then went on to promote for several lines this particular organization. Similar sentiments were posted concerning my private service book “*1 out of 5 stars ...* [name of the reviewer’s employer and book title deleted] *is the best and most knowledgeable in this field!! This one...not so much.*”

On closer inspection, I found similar “reviews” and ratings for *Roberts' Guide for Butlers & Household Staff*, by Robert Roberts M.D.; and *How to Hire & Retain Your Household Help: A Household HR Handbook*, by Guy Maddalone. And of course “*5 out of 5 stars BRILLIANT!!!!* [name of the reviewer’s employer and book titles deleted] *There are absolutely no books out as helpful and detailed as this one when it comes to Household Management!*”

All reviews were written on the same day by the same individual and posted from the same organizational email address. When I expressed concern to the principal of that organization, providing her with the exact

URLs and cutting and pasting the reviews, her first, rather perplexing response was:

"Where are these, you did not indicate where they were written? Really, of course we did not write it. For sure I would not have called my books pretentious! FYI in my early days, many persons said to me that they did not want the concept of the old American butler...additionally many women were outraged by the perspective that it could only be men. For me it just shows the great amount of work there is to be done in the profession in systematic understanding of terms and titles. I would be grateful that you not take these things personally."

When I persisted, the second response was: *"Don't take these things personally. Given what has come my way in the last several years, it's not that big of a deal. It's strictly an opinion from someone. I did not write it...it's not my style of writing."*

In other times, a lady or gentleman might have felt inclined to intercede, to set things straight, or at the least to apologize.

I advised a 25-year industry veteran (who was being pressured recently by this same organization to empty his cash reserves to pay for and enroll on their course, in order to "qualify" to be placed), "Have the courage of your convictions and faith in yourself, walk away." He did so and is now happily employed without the need for further training.

Before I follow my own advice, however, I have a duty to highlight briefly this rather disturbing trend that will pressure our profession out of existence if not corrected by none other than ourselves.

When times are tough, a lack of striving for probity (complete integrity) may seem the way to survive to some, but generally, people shy away from unethical individuals and organizations; and where such do survive, what survives is not what they promote they are, but another reality entirely. One dislikes airing dirty laundry, but there is a point where someone has to draw an imaginary line on the marble floor

and say as discreetly as possible, "If this profession is to have any credibility and survive as itself, then below-the-belt business practices, lowered standards and expectations, and the likes of Diana's ex cannot be allowed to set the standards, become the norm, nor our public face."

Yes, there are economic pressures, but the whole point about being a butler or the First Lady of Service, is that one walks the talk — or one is nothing but a public relations release on steroids.

Steven Ferry
Chairman

Steven Ferry can be reached via email at stevenferry@modernbutlers.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Ferry,

Thank you for the article on the current trend of the economy. I agree that one has to pull one's self up, put on a smile and laugh a lot.

...
Sincerely, Scott Hawk

Dear Mr. Ferry,

Just a quick note of appreciation to tell you how it is always a pleasure to read your Journal.

With thanks and warm regards,

François F. Martin
Head Butler

INTERESTING LINKS

ROYAL PALACE BUTLER SERVING UP SUCCESS

Lindsay, a footman at Buckingham Palace, has just become the first person in the country to pass her Butler's Diploma. The course is a nationally recognised qualification that was designed by her boss, Palace Steward Nigel McEvoy, alongside City &

Guilds and Thames Valley University (...in the United Kingdom):

<http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/UK-News/Buckingham-Palace-Footman-Lindsay-Steele-Is-The-First-To-Pass-The-National-Butlers-Diploma-Course/Article/200905115273277>

THROUGH THE EYES OF A HOTEL BUTLER: Mastering Guests' Information

by Osvaldo Torres Cruz

Nowadays, hotel services are focused on ensuring guests' satisfaction and offering unique experiences. To such end, many Hotels have created new departments whose goal is to get to know the guests and obtain information on them.

http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2009_2nd/May09_MasteringGuestInfo.html



HISTORY OF CHAUFFEURING PART IV

STARTING OFF
By Frank Mitchell



UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

If all else fails, consult the owner's manual. We have all heard this before; do not be tempted into figuring out the controls as you go along. If you divert your attention from the road long enough, you increase your risk of an accident. This is the reason why in some countries, it is illegal to adjust the radio while driving. Tests show that being distracted by controls or conversation can slow your reaction time to that of a driver who is over the legal blood-alcohol limit. This does not mean that you have to study the owner's manual from cover to cover on the first day on the job. Decide which functions are most likely to be needed and study those first.

EASY DOES IT

Our own cars are usually smaller, older or cheaper than our employers'. You will notice a marked reduction in the Noise, Vibration, Harshness index between a compact hatch and a luxury sedan. Subconsciously, we equate certain noise levels with certain speeds and so we can easily find ourselves speeding when driving a smoother, quieter vehicle, especially if it is much larger than our own. Do not rely on the sound of the engine or the view out of the front: *look* at the speedometer.



THE WOW FACTOR

Do not allow your quite understandable excitement to overwhelm you and let you forget your basics. This excitement can be just another distraction. Driving in unfamiliar territory can compound the effect.

One way to reduce this sensory overload is to drive the new route in your own car the day before. This may not always be possible, but it is worth considering for very important occasions. You don't want to make someone late for an international flight or get lost with a passenger. When I drove for weddings, I took my own car to the address a few days before to make sure that I knew how to get there and that there was no mistake with the directions. A bride may be late, but this should not be because the fool driving the wedding hack got lost.

OLDER IS WEIRDER



Older vehicles have idiosyncrasies; if you are not familiar with a design, say so. The R-Type above may have been the fastest 4-seater in production in 1953, but the braking system allowed a constant 19" of travel before the brakes worked; a microsecond at 100mph, an eon in the parking garage. I destroyed a storage closet in my garage with a 4-door version because I did not read the manual first. Some old cars even have the accelerator where the brake pedal should be!

GETTING FAMILIAR

Do not be tempted to stretch a performance car's legs until you are familiar with it. Statistically, luxury vehicles owned by the newly wealthy are the most likely to have a high-speed accident; their owners are simply caught unawares by what the vehicle can do and are unable to react quickly enough. Don't let the same thing happen to you!



Next month, we take a look at 'First Parades'. These are the potentially life-saving checks we carry out on a vehicle before setting off.

Frank Mitchell is a professional butler and butler trainer for the IIMB. He lives near Cape Town in South Africa and can be reached via email at frankmitchell@modernbutlers.com



WHEN BUTLER MEETS BUTLER

By Chip Heath

When my employers travel together on business, I am often asked to accompany them as both Butler and Valet. Typically, I arrive prior to my employers, thereby allowing me to check them into their hotel rooms, unpack their baggage, prepare their rooms and sort out any special arrangements (theatre tickets, hired limo, etc.).

Recently, my employers traveled to Washington, DC. I arrived in the morning in the hotel where they were to be staying, and was just beginning to unpack their luggage when suddenly I heard a light knock on the door. When I opened the door, I found myself face to face with something I had never encountered during my 12 years as a Butler in private service: a Hotel Butler.

After she introduced herself, assuming that I was the occupant of the rooms, she asked if there was anything she might do for me. I explained that I was the Butler for the guests who had not yet arrived. She

looked very confused and more than a little disappointed.

Smiling genuinely, I thanked her for her offer to help and asked if she might bring fresh ice to the room in a few hours while I was at the airport awaiting their arrival. I also asked if she would be kind enough to bring the flower delivery to the room.

Returning later with my employers, I was shocked to find that the flowers had not been delivered and that the ice bucket was completely empty. I could not imagine why the Hotel Butler had ignored my requests although I suspected that she did not feel obligated to help me, as I was not the occupant of the rooms in her charge. Perhaps in the eyes of a Hotel Butler, I was redundant?

What this Hotel Butler failed to realize, however, was that in not assisting me, she was not assisting my employers.

Shortly after I had delivered the flowers and fresh ice to their suite, the Hotel Butler returned to introduce herself to my employers. She was physically disappointed to find me again opening the door and asked to meet my employers. Explaining that they did not wish to be disturbed, the Hotel Butler glared at me and said, "Well, if they need any *real butlering*, please let them know that I am here for them." With that, she darted off down the corridor never to be seen again.

Admittedly, it may be rare for private service Butlers to be confronted with Hotel Butlers, but when it does happen, the best way forward is to see each other not as competition, but as allies. Hopefully all Butlers have one goal: to provide exceptional service. Why then would we not want to work together?

How marvelous it would have been for my employers to find not one, but two Butlers available to them. One could be drawing the bath while the other was escorting them from a business appointment. One could be serving drinks

while the other was out searching for a last-minute birthday gift they need for a dear associate.

And should a Hotel Butler fear that guests who travel with their own Butler will not offer any gratuity, I would remind them that we are to serve to the best of our abilities regardless of any verbal or financial gratitude offered.

When Butler meets Butler, it may be best to meet smile with smile, for seldom do we have opportunity to offer the best of both private service and hotel butlering.

Such a prospect is very exciting to me.

Mr. Heath is a professional butler/valet in private service and can be contacted via the Institute.

Editor note: apart from the fact that this butler was probably not trained as one to have such a money-motivated and adversarial attitude, she obviously was unaware that it is usually the valet/butler who takes care of minutiae such as tips, on behalf of the employer.



PACKING SILVER FOR SHIPPING

By Jeffrey Herman

The following instructions are tried and true techniques when shipping silver. Firstly, wear cotton or nitrile gloves, as fingerprints will etch silver. Objects, such as sectional candelabras, should be disassembled and wrapped individually. Use non-buffered tissue, which has a neutral ph and won't promote tarnish. For delicate pieces, such as handled baskets and epergnes, crumple the tissue and place it in all open areas so all

components will be supported. Next comes the bubble wrap, which will further cushion the object. Use as little tape as possible when securing the bubble wrap. Wrapping the entire bubble-wrapped object with packing tape makes it almost impossible to remove the piece without using a knife, which could damage the silver. A preferred technique is to take the wrapped object and place it in a plastic bag with a 3M Anti-Tarnish Strip. These activated charcoal strips absorb tarnish-producing gasses and are especially important if the piece is going to be stored for an extended period. Pack the object in a structurally sound 200 lb. test carton. Each piece should have a minimum of 2" (preferably more) of padding between

it and other piece(s) or the sides of the carton. The carton should be filled with Styrofoam peanuts, bubble wrap, or densely crumpled paper to snugly cushion the item(s). There should be NO inside movement after the carton has been taped. Always remove flatware from a flatware chest and wrap the pieces, otherwise, any bouncing in transit could lead to scratching.

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Mr. Herman owns Jeffrey Herman Silver Restoration & Conservation and can be contacted via jeff@hermansilver.com. Visit his website: <http://www.hermansilver.com>

The Institute is the only organization teaching butler skills with a focus on the mindset and superior communication skills of the traditional butler as applied to the modern world's service needs. Contact us for all your training needs via email at enquiries@modernbutlers.com or via telephone: USA 1-813- 354-2734. We invite you to also visit our website, <http://www.modernbutlers.com> for more information.

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