

## Featured Blog



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# Smart Oversight of Your Private Staff Can Prevent Giant Headaches

Just the other day, I heard from a client at her wit's end. She has eight employees across three residences—people she pays to make her life easier. Yet, she still finds herself scrubbing her own oven, picking up the family's clothes from the dry cleaner, and scrambling to find the right sports equipment from a tangled heap at the last minute before a child's class.

How did things go so wrong?

In my experience working with wealthy families, there are usually at least a few reasons. It often starts with the family itself, which isn't actively supervising staff, or delegating supervision to the appropriate individual. Policies are either informal or non-existent when it comes to vacation, sick time, tardiness, and so on. Staff, as a result, don't understand what is expected of them, and don't always ask.

In the worst-case scenario, families can struggle with high staff turnover, constant demands for increased compensation, and even safety risks caused by employees who refuse to follow the rules, or who are improvising in the absence of rules.

A talented private staff is indispensable. None of the great philanthropists of the early 20th century, let alone any of today's Forbes 400, could have achieved their great results without them. But in the absence of proper supervision and clear policies, the people you hire to help can actually become a hindrance.

Some employers are reluctant to admit they have a problem. The staff has become part of the family, making the issue can be awkward to discuss. But if your employees are creating worries for you rather than making your life easier, you have a problem.

The first step in correcting this problem is figuring out whether it stems from poor policies and poor supervision, or simply from hiring unqualified people. Here are three quick questions that will help lead you to the answer:

1. What are your policies and procedures for staff vacations? If you don't have a precise answer that is consistent across all of your staff and properties, you have a problem.
2. Who do staff turn to for questions or issues about their employment? If there is no go-to person—someone from your family office, say, or your estate or house manager—you have a problem.
3. Do you have current background, credit, and criminal checks for all staff? With most employers demanding this kind of security these days, those who do not are easy targets for workers who can't pass a background check...which means you have a problem.

If you answered "No" to any of the questions above, then it's possible that you are actually the source of the issues with your private staff.

So, how do you improve this situation? Follow the lead of other families who are finding creative ways to make their homes run more efficiently and effectively: Write detailed household manuals. Document all the systems in the home. Create maintenance calendars. I'm not saying that any of this is easy or quick—it isn't. But it will make an enormous difference.

It's also important to figure out which of your current employees are meeting the family's needs and which are not.

Start by writing a description for each staff position in your homes. Be sure to avoid tailoring these descriptions to the people who are already on your staff. Instead, try to write them as you would if you had terminated everyone and were starting fresh.

This process will help you identify the employees who aren't doing their jobs well. It will also make it clear which important tasks have been overlooked and aren't being performed by anyone.