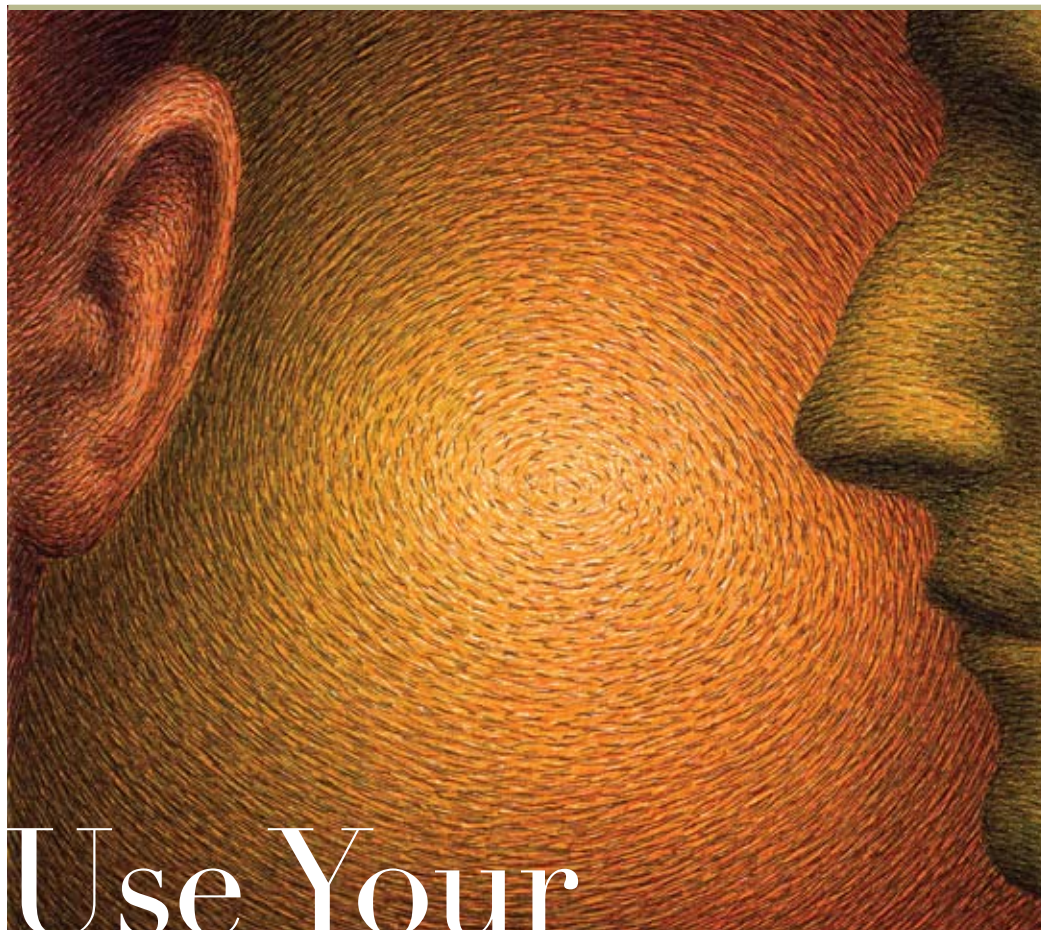


By Ute Meier



Use Your Judgment

MATTERS OF DISCRETION

Media and paparazzi present a very serious threat to VIPs, celebrities, and prominent individuals. Not only do they seek to garner general info and everyday news, but many are also after the most personal details and juiciest secrets—and they will do what it takes to convey these facts to the public.

In order to obtain these morsels of information, those who make a living off celebs often contact the household personnel and attempt to convince them to share information in exchange for money and gifts. After all, the personnel are often the ones who know best such specific

facts as when the boss rises and what he or she eats for breakfast, as well as more obscure details, such as how often he or she receives Botox.

As a result of the intimate nature of the job, it is of the utmost importance for household personnel to practice discretion. After all, any slip of the tongue or other misdemeanor can wreak havoc on the personal and professional life of an employer.

It is advised for household staff to model the behavior of those three wise monkeys from the Japanese maxim, “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” They should try to remove themselves

from or “close their ears” to those situations in which information of the most confidential nature is revealed.

The service personnel must always make a point to present their employers in the best possible light, regardless of any chaos that may occur behind closed doors. Violating confidentiality agreements can have dire consequences for employees, including immediate termination and lawsuits.

You can probably recognize that such lifelong discretion is missing from the Royal Family in England, as both the former private butler and former private secretary

of Princess Diana disclosed personal details of the former Princess’s life in books and television interviews. Paul Burrell, Princess Diana’s former private butler, revealed intimate details about the Princess’s private life, including her secret love affairs, in his tell-all books *The Way We Were* and *A Royal Duty*, as well as in promotional interviews. Meanwhile, Princess Diana’s private secretary, Patrick Jephson, published the revelatory books *Shadows of a Princess* and *Portraits of a Princess*, much to the Royal Family’s dismay. Having willfully ignored confidentiality agreements with regard to disclosing tidbits of gossip to the media, both Burrell and Jephson are examples of discretion gone astray.

Above all else, when practicing discretion, you can never fail by using common sense. A client of ours recalled the time when he hosted a large party at his estate, with numerous public figures in attendance. His employee, who was expected to work at the event, arrived at the party wearing an evening gown and asked her employer where she should sit down. Needless to say, our client was not impressed.

Thus, it must be said, discretion begins with the minutest of matters, and there is generally not an end in sight. Each member of the household staff must recognize when and where this discretion begins for his or her employer. ☺

Ute Meier is the owner of Consulting Home & Garden in Germany. She began this domestic-staffing service in 1996, after working as a housekeeper in exclusive households. Using those contacts, Ute began what is now an international service.