

By Ute Meier



Staff Education and Training

HOW MUCH IS NECESSARY?

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS ARE CHANGING WITH GLOBALIZATION.

In my line of work, I am often asked what education, training, and skills should be expected of different members of the household staff. The answer to this question depends on quite a few factors, including the specific job type and requirements, past employment history, and employer preferences.

Today, standard training programs for household staff generally involve a three-year commitment and include various courses of study, from food preparation and service to interior design and maintenance or handling of media. Further training may be required for positions of greater responsibility, such as estate manager or financial manager.

Let's start with nannies and housekeepers. There are a number of different types of nannies—educators, nurses, etiquette specialists—each requiring specialized training. As a placement agency, we screen candidates, accepting and placing only those who have the appropriate training or who have worked for at least two years in a private household and can provide good references. Occasionally, underqualified candidates are able to get their foot in the door through private hiring methods, such as newspaper listings or personal contacts. Employers who are less well-off but still want to keep a nanny may accept applicants without a degree—

something unacceptable in upper-class households.

Additionally, with regard to housekeepers, there are schools available in which potential candidates undergo an extensive and difficult training program. In fact, the first housekeeping school in Germany was established in 1878. However, individuals seeking careers in this field are seldom educated beyond the junior-high-school level; they often find these professional training programs challenging and achieve only average grades. But while certain employers place more weight on candidates' grades, others are more interested in their qualifications.

Butlers and caretakers often lack formal training and begin their careers as stewards on yachts or gain experience working in a hotel. Generally, this is because there is no specific training for butlers, only specialized further training, which is very expensive and is not sponsored by the state. Programs in specialized schools normally run for three to six months. In contrast, there are a number of positions where training is an absolute must. Prime examples include bodyguard and chef. All bodyguards undergo special career training (which may include certain licenses) and often have a solid background

in police work or military service. Similarly, chefs must finish culinary school and then build their résumés working in hotels and restaurants before they are even considered for private household work. There is no such thing as a self-taught chef in the private household.

To some degree, these education and training requirements are changing with globalization. Nannies are a perfect example. In the past few years, we've seen a greater emphasis placed on a candidate's experience and on-the-job training than on the applicant's formal education. Today, a candidate with a high-school diploma and two years abroad as an *au pair* may find more opportunities than a trained educator. Well-traveled upper-class families are increasingly seeking educated and worldly nannies with foreign-language competence.

No matter what household position you are looking to fill, staffing agencies provide a great resource to screen applicants and find the most qualified and appropriate candidate for your home. ☺

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.

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