



Service PLEASE

WE'RE FARMING OUT HOUSEHOLD AND PERSONAL TASKS LIKE NEVER BEFORE. AMY MOLLOY REPORTS ON THE RISE OF 'EXTREME OUTSOURCING' AND ASKS, ARE WE JUST TOO LAZY?

When it comes to hiring help, there seems to be a hierarchy of acceptability. It's now normal to call in an expert to fix your car, to clean your house, to style your wardrobe... but how about to name your child for you? This is the tedious task (#sarcasm) that Marc Hauser's Swiss "baby-naming agency", Erfolgswelle, will take off your hands – for a fee of \$US31,000.

"We all need some help from professionals sometimes," insists Hauser. "It's funny – we don't try to cut our hair on our own, so why should this situation be any different? We have all kinds of families hiring us from across the world, including Australia."

But why so pricey? Well, this isn't just a matter of buying a baby book and tossing up between Susan and Sarah. Hauser's firm has a team of 14 naming experts, four historians, and 12 translators – plus two trademark attorneys to ensure names don't conflict with companies and products. After custom-crafting a "unique name that has a story with a positive message", it even conducts market research to see if people react positively to it.

"It's like composing music or drawing; we transform existing elements into new,

never-heard-of creations," Hauser explains. "A lot of the families that come to us have noticed the mistakes other parents have made in naming their babies – especially celebrities – and they've decided not to make the same errors. Sometimes I hear names of newborns and I think, 'Why didn't they care more about that name? Their child will have it for a lifetime.'"

If you're like me, you might be scratching your head right now. Have we really got to the stage where naming our own children is beyond us? Is the pressure too much? Do we peer into the cots of our newborns and think, "Too-hard basket! Surely there's someone I can pay to do this for me."

It's not only naming rights that are being delegated to third parties. We have entered a new era of 'extreme outsourcing', where a wave of services allow busy professionals, overstretched parents or isolated singles to pay someone else to take on those tricky tasks and

everyday decisions, whether it's what to eat, how to exercise or how to reply to that last message on Tinder (more on that later).

The kind folk from personal assistant company Pink Spaghetti shared some recent requests with me. They included: buying a bottle of whiskey for a client's father, helping to hang mirrors at a flattering angle in a client's house and even finishing the last entry on a crossword for a twentysomething woman who said it was driving her insane not being able to figure it out.

Via the website Fiverr, which allows you to outsource tasks for as little as \$5, you can employ a stranger to manage your online dating profile, make a fancy-dress costume for your child, plan your proposal or arduously file your holiday photos into albums. Oh, and if you are daunted by the mere thought of travelling, you can pay someone to send a postcard on your behalf from the location of your dreams so you can say, "Wish you were here" without ever actually going there.

Yet, as crazy (and lazy) as this sounds, let's put it into perspective. A lot of the tasks we do see as socially acceptable to outsource (hiring an expert to do our ironing, wrap our gifts or cook and deliver our dinner) would've been seen as disgraceful by our mothers, their mothers and their mothers. Of course things change, and we are currently living through what's been called a 'busy-ness epidemic', but where will it all end? And is this empowering or are we in danger of becoming completely codependent?

"The term 'outsourcing' used to be the domain of the business world, but now it's being applied to a personal environment," says Adele Blair, managing director of The Concierge Collective. "We charge by the hour and have a retainer model, like a gym membership or a Foxtel plan, where you can choose how many hours of support you need a week and then ask us to do absolutely anything – and we really do hear it all."

Recently this included being called by a client who was in bed with a hangover and *needed* a green smoothie picked up from her local health-food shop, although Blair says many of the requests are more practical. "I work for a number of professional single women," she says. "One of them, for

instance, is at the top of her profession. She is also a marathon runner and travels regularly. I'm currently having new windows and satellite television installed in her house because she can't wait at home for a tradesman."

Blair says the requests her company receives tend to be more extreme in volume than in specifics.



"We work for women who probably outsource 70 per cent of the everyday tasks our mothers would have done themselves," she says. "But think about it this way: our mothers would have probably spent 70 per cent fewer hours at work. I always say, 'You can't solve modern-day problems with traditional methods.' We're busier than ever, so why would you try to time-manage using strategies your granny used?"

But let's not point the finger only at female outsourcers. In fact, it was far easier for me to find men who admit to being serial delegators. "Oh, I've outsourced some pretty weird stuff," reveals Sydney-based app designer Brandon Cowan, 20. "I found a relationship expert on Fiverr and paid him to sign into my Tinder account, optimise my profile and speak to women for me. The way I see it, people are so fake and superficial on these dating apps, it didn't matter if I paid someone else to do it for me. He interviewed me on Skype for half an hour to find out about the type of girls I like and then he took over."

Cowan also paid a stranger he found on Fiverr to sing and film a birthday message for his father, which he then posted on Facebook. "I think of it this way, if I were designing an app and didn't know how to do it, I would outsource it, without hesitation," he says.

"Most of my business is run that way, so why not my personal life, too?"

OK, but when does this DDIY (don't do it yourself) mindset cross over into the murky waters of codependency? "Although there's no such thing as complete independence, because as humans we rely on one another in some form or other, creating a situation where you *need* someone to do something for you, versus *want*, can be



"You're psychologically or emotionally returning to an earlier stage in development, in an attempt to find comfort and to avoid the stress and pressures of adult life."

Speaking of regressing to a childlike state, Hauser admits he has plans to expand the baby-naming agency into other areas of personal outsourcing, although he wouldn't reveal his plans just yet (paying someone to teach your kid about the birds and

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unhealthy," warns psychotherapist Joy Sereda. "For example, if I get a flat tyre, am I going to call roadside assistance to come and change it for me? You bet! But if they couldn't get to me, or if I were in the middle of nowhere with no cell-phone service, am I capable of changing it myself? Absolutely."

It could also be seen as the equivalent of moving out of home but still taking your laundry home to your mother. "Willingly creating a dependency on others could be considered a sign of regression," says Sereda.

the bees, perhaps?). As a father of two, did he name his own children himself? "Yes, I did, because we didn't have another option 17 years ago, when my daughters were born," he admits. "However, a third baby would get a unique and outstanding name now that we have [the resources] in our team to create it." Whether this is really progress or not is a matter of personal opinion – or maybe you could hire someone else to make your mind up for you? **S**

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