

*You're a what?*



# Corporate

**G**ordon Jones saves time for busy people who have no time to spare. As a corporate concierge, he arranges for a vast variety of personal and business-related services for corporate clients.

When Jones launched his company, Concierge of Boston, in 1988, he planned to cater to top executives and managers. Today, Jones and his staff of four help all kinds of employees manage their work responsibilities, work-related social activities, and personal lives. "Our job," says Jones, "is to find solutions for our clients in a timely, cost-effective manner and let them stay focused on their work."

Sometimes, Jones provides services like those a traveler might receive from a hotel concierge. He arranges limousine service, makes dinner reservations, and procures tickets for sporting contests, concerts, and cultural events.

Unlike a hotel concierge, Jones may also have clients ask him to charter a private aircraft, rent a yacht, or schedule a ride on a hot air balloon for a special occasion. "Their wish is our command," Jones says. He once even

arranged for a baby elephant to make a brief visit to a child's birthday party.

More commonly, Jones offers party planning services for company holiday parties. He reserves a venue, deals with caterers, and arranges entertainment. Need a mime or a face painter to amuse the children at a company picnic? No problem. Jones knows whom to call.

Other tasks have more ordinary business implications. Jones often books hotel and conference rooms for business meetings involving out-of-town attendees. He also connects clients with vendors that provide audiovisual equipment, temporary office help, document translation, and computer instruction, rental, and repair.

Some corporate concierges work in the same buildings as their clients, but Jones does not. "Although we're not sitting there," he says, "we're just a phone call, an e-mail, or a fax away." He receives most requests by phone. "At times," he says, "I've probably sat at my desk 8 hours straight through, fielded 80 or 90 phone calls in a day, and never left the office."

Jones usually fulfills client requests by calling appropriate vendors. "I can just make a call," he says, "and buy tickets for a client, for example, and have a messenger take them over."

But Jones notes that some requests require a more personal touch. A client might ask that a special gift basket be put together, for instance. Then the concierge becomes a personal shopper and seeks out just the right combination of items to fill the basket.

Jones looks just as carefully for the right combination of qualifications when hiring a concierge. Communication skills

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by Matthew Mariani

# conciierge

and attention to detail are key. "You have to be detail-oriented and polite," Jones says. "You need to listen closely and never second guess your client. You ask questions and find out exactly what the client wants."

If someone requests limousine service to the airport, the concierge must know how to query for particulars. Is this client catching a flight or having someone picked up? What are the arrival and departure times and the flight number? How many people are in the party? Hiring a limousine that seats six passengers when the party includes eight will not do.

The role of the corporate concierge also requires tact. "You deal with all kinds of people with different needs and attitudes," Jones says. "You can have some really pushy people who could be having a bad day, and you could be the one who gets part of it." A good concierge handles difficult clients with diplomacy.

Although the occupation does not require college education, many corporate concierges have bachelor's degrees, according to Jones. He notes that concierges often have some travel experience and work history in hospitality-related businesses. Job

experience in hotels or catering helps some workers develop the interpersonal skills and savvy corporate concierges need.

Data on the employment and earnings of concierges do not identify corporate concierges as a distinct group. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 18,000 concierges were employed in the United States in 2000. Corporate concierges likely accounted for a small portion of the total. Jones estimates that there are about 2,000 corporate concierges nationwide. A much larger number of concierges work in hotels and motels, providing services for guests. Although the Bureau cannot classify corporate concierges as such, it does project that

the employment of concierges in general will increase by almost 16 percent from 2000 to 2010.

Median earnings for all concierges were about \$20,200 in 2000. But Jones thinks that corporate concierges earn more. They often receive commissions based on arrangements they make for hotel rooms and some other services, in addition to their usual salary.

The occupation offers nonfinancial rewards as well. Jones enjoys meeting and dealing with new people and finding ways to fulfill unique requests. His ability to arrange almost anything, anyplace, for anyone has earned him respect. And at day's end, Jones never has trouble getting reservations for himself at the restaurant of his choice.

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