The Indomitable British Butler

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Thank you very much for your vote of confidence. I'll take this applause as an advanced payment and hope that I may do it justice in the next hour. I plan for our time together to err on the side of pleasurable and if I fail in this mission, feel free to walk out. I, for one, would lose too much sleep knowing that anyone here had dislocated his or her jaw executing an overly ambitious yawn.

If I happen to use a word or say something that you cannot decipher, either because I mumbled or someone coughed or my accent was intolerably un-American, please feel free to wave a hand so I can clarify my meaning. It is important that you track with me at all times, otherwise we'll drift apart and you will not be saying anything polite or even printable about me when you leave.

Mrs. Starkey, a wonderful lady, has asked me to talk to you about that strange noun and verb, "butling," British style. She suggested that I read from my book, *The British Butler's Bible*, and while that is terribly flattering, I have a better idea—that you'd be better off getting you money's worth when you purchase the book (which Mary also suggested that I encourage you to do), because then the information would be pristine to you, and not second hand.

And my message, Archduke, ladies and gentlemen, is quite simple. I'll leave it to you to determine what it is, and perhaps you can do me the courtesy of clarifying for me at the end of our time together, what that message might be.

What is a British butler? "Officially," and I quote from *The British Butler's Bible* here, because I couldn't have put it better myself, "according to dictionary consensus, the Butler is "a male servant and head of the household." The Oxford English Dictionary breathes some life into the word with the tidbit that two thousand years ago, "buticula" meant "bottle" to a Roman.

Presumably, after enough bacchanalian orgies, the bottle became synonymous with the person bringing it around to the average reveler; and even though the word evolved from Latin, through French and into its current English form of "Butler," the idea has remained essentially the same: a Butler is a person who caters to the needs and pleasures of the wealthy.

Let us flesh out this definition, however, to arrive at a more complete understanding of the "British butler."

To understand any fact at all, it is necessary to compare it to a datum of comparable magnitude. It would be hard for an aborigine of 17th century Australia, for instance, to understand a car in the absence of a datum of comparable magnitude, such as, let us say, a series of pictographs showing a canoe on wheels that paddles itself much faster than a kangaroo can bound. With this understanding, rather than view this new wonder as some embodiment of an evil spirit, the Aborigine might be more inclined to venerate it in the same way that most Americans do, today.

Similarly, let us draw upon Mrs. Starkey's technology to review a Day in the Life of a butler in the average 12th century castle in England, just after the arrival of William the Conk, as those whom he conquered in 1066 may have known him. For this window overlooking our past, I am indebted to Joseph and Francis Gies, authors of *Medieval Life in a Medieval Castle*, published by Harper & Row. Personal service, obviously, is not a recent phenomenon, so let's immerse ourselves in the roots and see where doing so takes us.

During the Middle Ages in England, most domestic staff were men, usually themselves of "gentle" birth, working for the nobility as part of their training for court and other activities. As a note, for those who may be wondering, the only women who worked in households were washerwomen, nurses, and "gentlewomen" who waited on the ladies of the castle. The Butler worked under the direction of the steward and was basically responsible for the care and serving of wines. The steward, whom we would now call a Butler Administrator or Household Manager, supervised the domestic affairs of his master's castle, such as the service at the table, directing the staff and managing the finances.

The wine was mostly imported from Bordeaux, which the English ruled at the time. In the absence of any effective technique for stoppering containers, the wine would not keep beyond a year and so had to be drunk young. Vintage, therefore, was not an issue, and the idea of inhaling the bouquet and savoring the taste was still several hundred years away, as Peter of Blois notes in a letter describing the serving of wine one day at Henry II's court:

> *"The wine is turned sour and moldy—thick, greasy, stale, flat and smacking of pitch. I have sometimes seen even great lords served with wine so muddy that a man must needs close his eyes and clench his teeth, wry-mouthed and shuddering, and filtering the stuff rather than drinking."*

This challenge to his professionalism notwithstanding, the butler would receive wine in barrels and decant it into jugs. Some he would spice and sweeten for the final course.

Local brews made from barley, wheat, and/or oats by an alewife, were drunk mainly by the servants and were not the domain of the butler. Part of the

reason brewing was left to women was the view held at the time that beer was as much a food as a drink. Perhaps the reason the nobles suffered the wine is because, as the noted authority, Peter of Blois, again describes, "the ale is horrid to the taste and abominable to the sight."

With the most important guests at the high table, the loftiest place reserved for an ecclesiastical dignitary, the second for the ranking layman, a procession of servants would enter after Grace had been said. First came the pantler with the bread and butter, followed by the butler and his assistants with the wine, and beer for those who desired.

Guests were served at dinner with two meats and two lighter dishes. Between courses, the steward would send the servers into the kitchen and see to it that they brought in the meats quietly and without confusion.

Ceremony marked the service at table. There was a correct way to do everything, from the laying of cloths to the cutting of trenchers and carving of meat. A trencher, by the way, is a wooden platter for the serving of food and meat. Part of a squire's training included learning how to serve his lord at meals: the order in which dishes should be presented, for instance, where they should be placed, how many fingers to use in holding the joint for the lord to carve, and how to place trenchers on the table. Not too far a cry from table etiquette today, I think.

The solid parts of soups and stews were eaten with a spoon, the broth sipped. Meat was cut up with the knife and eaten with the fingers. Two persons shared a dish, the lesser helping the more important, the younger the older, the man the woman. The former in each case breaking the bread, cutting the meat, and passing the cup.

Etiquette books admonished diners not to leave the spoon in the dish or put elbows on the table, not to belch, not to drink or eat with their mouths full, not to stuff their mouths or take overly large helpings. Not surprisingly, in light of the finger-eating and dish-sharing, stress was laid on keeping hands and nails scrupulously clean, wiping spoon and knife after use—forks were not used at that time—wiping the mouth before drinking, and not dipping meat in the salt dish. Contrary to legend, Medieval man loved baths and took them regularly in what were called "stews"—large tubs filled with hot water in which one stewed for a while. Hard soaps had just appeared from Spain, luxury articles made of olive oil, soda, lime, and aromatic herbs (hence the modern Castile soap). These replaced the soaps made in the manorial workshops out of mutton fat, wood ash and natural soda, and were greatly appreciated by the butlers of the time.

While butlers could be counted upon, then, not to be too recognizable by their musk, they could be considered hirsute for the very good reason that shaving was difficult, painful, and infrequent. The soap didn't lather and the razors were nothing more than small carving knives, often old and dull.

Haircutting scissors were similar to grass-trimming shears and pulled mightily. As for halitosis, it was another century before even the lord and lady of the manor had access to tooth brushes. The butler had to make do with rubbing his teeth with a green hazel twig and wiping with a woolen cloth.

Does this trip back down the butler's genealogical tree help us appreciate his roots? Possibly not, although I am sure our appreciation, for everything from proper-stopping techniques at vineyards to toothbrushes aplenty on supermarket shelves today, has grown immeasurably.

However, like the dusty vats of malmsey (a sweet wine) that he so lovingly looked after in the cobwebbed cellar, the Butler has matured over the centuries into a richer, rarer and more complex figure in the household.

As the middleclass took to hiring more staff during the industrial revolution —did you know that the lower rung of the middle class was redefined in London to include anyone who could afford only three servants— and as downsizing impacted the large English household in the 20th century, the Steward and his duties were gradually assumed by the butler, who became, as the Oxford dictionary so correctly states today, the head of the servant household. Let us leave England and discover what the American butler was engaged in after the country was granted its independence by dear, mad, King George.

A Mr. Roberts laid down the vital points a butler should know in his *The House Servant's Directory of 1827*.

- The benefit of early rising
- Trimming & cleaning lamps
- Setting up the candles
- Regulations for the pantry
- Regulations for the dinner table
- Setting out the dinner table
- Waiting on dinner
- Extinguishing lamps and shutting up the house
- And lastly,
- Address & behavior to employers

As we can see, the butlers skill-set had extended in America to the candles as well as the pantry. And what is his skill-set today, now that we rarely use candles and few architectural plans include a pantry? I am reminded in this, by the way, of the story of the wealthy English landowner who, upon checking employee records, called a longtime employee into his study.

"Peter," asked the landowner, "how long have you been with us now?"

(Devonshire accent) "Arlmowst tweni foive yeer," replied the employee, at which his employer frowned.

"According to these records, you were hired to take care of the stables," the landowner pointed out.

"Thart's c'rrect, Sur," responded the veteran employee.

"But we haven't owned horses for over 20 years," declared the landowner.

"Roit, Sur," replied the old retainer. "Whart werd yer loik mee tu do next?"

I know of no butlers at this time who can boast such a relaxed work schedule, but before we look at Butling as she is did today, let's anticipate the household environment we can look forward to enjoying in the very near future.

As a writer, I have the opportunity of conducting interviews with highly interesting and diverse groups of people, and one particular group I have had the fortune of hobnobbing with is that ethereal, forward-looking minority of beings whom we call, for want of a better moniker, Futurists.

They do not have to go too far out on a limb to draw bizarre-to-our-ears scenarios, because science and technology are advancing at such a rapid pace that we no longer have to wait a lifetime, for the Dick Tracey, two-way audio-visual monitor-on-a-wristwatch to become a reality. We are only a few years away from the growth of computers—not in terms of growth in production or capacity, which we already enjoy, but in terms of computers existing at the cellular level, being grown in Petrie dishes.

So when I tell you that we can look forward to domestic help in the form of R2D2s, you may well say, "Oh, we've been hearing about that since the 1920s." And I won't deny it.

But you may like to know that one Dutch supermarket chain already has robot cleaners in service, machines called Sinas and built by Siemens. Nicknamed Schrobbie, the robots carefully navigate around obstacles and, if an obstacle happens to be a human, will politely ask them to step aside with the words, which I translate into English for the benefit of those present, *(robovoice)* "Excuse me, I'd like to clean here." It's not bad for a robot. Of course, a real maid would know not to disturb guests with her chores—in fact, she would have been let go without references two centuries ago—but this is a restriction that robots no doubt would find most illogical. Now you may laugh, but when Schrobbie isn't scrubbing and vacuuming, he (or she) is distributing mail, conducting inspection rounds, and transporting passengers and goods. If you think change over the last five years has been rapid, better not blink during the next five.

Sony corporation has already built a 10-pound human robot that can kick a soccer ball, walk, wave, and dance. Within a few years, the company expects this robot to perform household tasks. Honda wants to give it voice-recognition capability and the ability to identify faces—with a master plan of assigning them to Honda car showrooms to help salespeople. Obviously, Japanese car salespeople are unlike their American counterparts, as they seem to have difficulty recognizing people and speaking to them, otherwise Honda would not be looking further a-field for its "personnel."

By the way, always being somewhat intrigued by derivations, I looked into this word "robot" and discovered that a Czech dramatist coined it in 1920. He was looking for a name for the artificial creatures in his play. Originally, he proposed the word "labors." His brother suggested "Robota," which means "work" in various Slavic languages. Both provide a clear indication of the destiny man envisions for his robots. Let's hope that, in playing God, we have the foresight to allow them at least one day off a week, or the next thing we know, we'll have Robot unions, go slows and walk outs. Now, why will we see more, not less, robots—apart from the natural proclivity of man to tinker with machines? Not because we will ever run out of those people willing to do the jobs we ourselves eschew. But because we constantly look to control our environment, and robots are imminently more predisposed to obeying orders than humans, who tend to have their own ideas. And that is *exactly* why we will continue to see butlers and other household personnel very much in evidence in households. Because we can think for ourselves and we are alive.

There are, however, some employees who act as if they are robots, needing to be controlled instead of acting under their own direction. They can be exhausting to have around. If even human robots are the bane of households and organizations, then surely the constant inability to ORIGINATE action that is intelligent and out of the norm, will drive employers to consign most of their robots to the back of the golf cart garage, and bring in real people.

Although I do not consider robots the universal panacea that some manufacturers hope for, there is no doubt in my mind that we will be seeing more of them. And used intelligently, they do have their place.

NEC, another company, is building a home robot that can recognize household objects with its two camera eyes and remotely control TV sets and other appliances. By watching points on its owner's face, it can tell whether he or she is happy, sad, frustrated, angry, confused, or apathetic. Something most butlers have a finely honed sense for, as a matter of self-preservation.

NEC's robot even has a built-in video camera for recording video messages. When it sees the intended recipient of the message, it says *(robovoice)* "Hi, I have a message for you" and plays the video. One hopes it will have the intelligence to note that, when the human's face looks angry, it's not the time

to play that message from the bank president about the question of the overdrawn account. Or that when the Mrs. is present, the Mr. doesn't want to see that message from his latest secret dalliance.

For those who may not have the time to look after pet messes, vet bills and the daily walk regimen, there is now Robodog from Sony—the electronic pet that will fetch, play, and bark. And more recently, RoboCat was created who, like its cleaning-maid cousin, is also capable of interacting with its owner, needing love and attention and developing his or her own specific feline personality. Just like a real cat, she has emotions, purrs when stroked and sleeps whenever—and wherever—she wants. Microphones let her recognize her own name and react by turning her head and blinking. You'd think that with 58 million dogs and 66 million cats in the US alone, the need for metallic substitutes would be somewhat contrived. However, they do represent the fuzzy and warm end of the robot spectrum. More utilitarian are the robots being created at the Edmonton Research Park in Alberta. Robotics experts there are working on creating teams of cheap, disposable robots to achieve complex tasks without communicating with each other, based on research of, yes, you got it, ant colonies.

It is far cheaper and easier to build a large number of simple robots, apparently, than to build one expensive, complex robot to do the same job. The question is, who wants a colony of metallic ants underfoot in the house, that you can't even plug a name into? Pass the RAID, please.

While robots will appear a handful of years up the line, we are already beginning to see the following.

Automation in the house that includes microwave ovens that read a pre-packaged food's bar code, download recipes from the company's web site and follow instructions for preparing the meal.

A system called Aware Home senses inhabitants and responds to voice commands. Another system uses a small pendant that watches for and responds to gestures that control appliances. Make a drinking motion and the water purifier may start up, for instance. But then again, maybe the fridge door will open and milk and beer will be ejected, too. Humans will no longer have a monopoly on misreading messages.

There used to be a time when bespoke tailors behind Bond Street were the Mecca for the nattier dressed man, when pure Marino wool sweaters were the smarter additions to one's wardrobe. The smart clothing to buy now, it seems, is "intelligent clothing" —meaning clothing that sports small built in computers—trousers with mobile phones, shirts with walkie-talkies. Researchers are working on a keyboard made out of smart fabric that can be sewn into trousers or, for those women working in businesses who still wear them, skirts. To use it, they just sit down and start typing on their lap, making this the first truly laptop computer. The keyboard, by the way, is washable,

shockproof, and even ironable. The company is now working on a necktie that functions as a mouse, and I wonder to myself, where are they going to put the monitor? Did you know, by the way, while on the subject of clothes, why men's shirts have the buttons on the right and women's blouses have the buttons on the left? It's not to differentiate the gender of the intended wearer, as commonly supposed.

Buttons were relatively expensive during Queen Victoria's reign and so were generally worn by the wealthy. Ladies who were able to afford buttons were also invariably dressed by servants, most of who were right handed. Do you see the picture? The buttons had to be on the lady's left for right-handed servants. Most gentlemen, on the other hand, while they had valets to lay out their clothes, tended to dress themselves—so their buttons were placed on the right side of the shirt.

The tailors who made shirts for those who could afford buttons, but not servants, copied the style of the wealthy, and so women's buttons have remained stubbornly on the left, even though most women are right handed and no longer need assistance in dressing. Such is the logic of tradition.

Which reminds me, if you will excuse another digression, of another fascinating story, attributed to Professor Tom O'Hare at the University of Texas and written for the delight of engineers. The U.S. standard railway gauge (which is the distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. This gauge is used because the English built railroads to that gauge and U.S. railroads were built by English expatriates.

Why did the English build railroads to that gauge? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge that they used. Why did those wheelwrights use that gauge? Because the people who built the horse-drawn trams used the same tools that they used for building wagons, which used that same wheel spacing. Why did the wagons use that odd wheel spacing? For the practical reason that any other spacing would break an axle on some of the old, long distance roads with well-established wheel ruts. Who built these old, rutted roads? The first long distance roads in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The initial ruts were first made by Roman war chariots, which were of uniform military issue.

Thus, we have the answer to the original question. The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specification for a Roman army war chariot. A specification, by the way, is the technical order that engineers are given to follow in building something.

Let me break briefly from this story to remark that specifications and bureaucracies live forever, it seems, neither of them are popular with crusty engineers. I say this to soften the blow of the good professor's closing remarks:

So, the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be right on target. Because the Imperial Roman chariots were made to be just wide enough to accommodate the back-ends of two warhorses. Tradition and precedent can be two-edged swords, as any Butler who has had to wear tails in the great Florida outdoors, during a summer afternoon, can testify.

Returning now to the 21st century, clothes, it seems, have joined the multi-functional bandwagon, being fashioned to alert us when we have forgotten the house keys, to play music that fits our mood, and, lest we forget, to cover our derrieres and other assorted body parts. Maybe my tone smacks of the same indignation British buckle makers must have felt when the shoestring finally put them out of business at the close of the 18th century. But we have gone from quality, natural clothes to permanent press finishes that require no ironing, to the latest advance: a new fabric under development, according to the American Chemical Society, that kills pathogenic and odor-causing bacteria, not to mention a few viruses. So now we need not wash our clothes, either?!

We are a long way from the butlers of the 12th century with their mutton-fat soap and sour wines. But at least they knew they had to work for a living and for a standard of living. What about that other treasured domain of the butler—food? Here, technology is crowding him out again. Stick-on food patches are the 21st century cuisine of choice, romantically named the Transdermal Nutrient Delivery System—I can see it now, "TNDS" stalls right next to the TCBY stalls in airports. The "system," which doesn't even have the marketing sense to call itself a cuisine, transmits the vitamins and nutrients needed to maintain the human body, through the skin. Considering the average person ingests a ton of food and drink each year, that's an awful lot of stick-on patches to stick wherever one sticks them.

Not that first aid is the purview of the butler, but, to round out the picture of the changes ahead, it used to be that when you lost a body part, that was it. Lately, one has been able to sew in a spare from someone else's body. But even this won't be necessary anymore, as the technology is refined for growing body parts from stem cells cloned from one's own cells. Maybe somewhere between this technology and Dolly, that famous English sheep, lies the Fountain of Eternal Youth, the Holy Grail that has galvanized many into ardent action since before the 12th century—my reference being Monty Python, I am sure.

So is there a message amidst all these ramblings? I would hope so. While the British butler represents a great tradition, while he has techniques and technologies for looking after a household in grand style, he will not fare well, and more to the point, nor will his employers, if his forte is the proper techniques for extinguishing candles or reviving sour wine—or even the 20th century equivalents. If he (or she, because women have been butlers in

households for several hundred years) considers that there is only one right way to do something, the way that Mr. Smudge, who worked his way up from Third to First Footman to the Queen before he expired in an untimely fashion, used to insist upon, then obviously there's a reality gap. Which brings me to another suggestion that Mrs. Starkey made—that I elaborate upon the pros and cons of the British butler in the American marketplace.

Today's British butler cannot rely upon his old skills. In the immortal words of Vice President Gore, he has to keep reinventing himself—hopefully, less self-consciously than our dearly departed VP.

And I'm tempted to cheat here and give you the gist of the message I want to convey today: that whatever the duties were, are or will be, the British butler will need to move with the expectations and technologies of the time. He will have to adapt to the country he finds himself in. But as long as he realizes that there is one fundamental that will NEVER change, he will always be a success, and his employers invariably satisfied with his performance. This fundamental concerns the tricky art of living for decades on end in someone else's house, when even family and friends stink after three days, as the saying goes. It's quite a trick, when you look closely. I *would* like to look more closely, therefore, not at the tricks of the trade, not at the way an American household Manager wakes up the employer, compared to how a British butler does it. These are peculiarities that can be learned at schools like The Starkey Institute and then refined according to the employer's wishes. I would like, instead, to focus in the time we have remaining, upon the characteristics that make the British butler, one who his worth his salt—which expression, I hasten to add, derives from the medieval practice in wealthier households that could afford salt, of positioning the salt cellar in front of the master.

To his left sat his wife and the other members of the household and to his right sat the guests, placed very carefully in order of wealth and merit. This table etiquette was known as The Order of the Salt, from which we now have the idioms, "worth his salt," "below the salt" and "right hand man."

Attention to detail and a caring to strive for perfection make the British butler the ideal employee for the wealthy, most of who care greatly about their hard-won possessions and enjoying the level of quality that they have attained in their lives. Maybe not the same kind of perfectionism that Leonardo Da Vinci displayed when he painted four completely different versions of Mona Lisa on the same canvas before he was satisfied, but a professionalism closely resembling it. A story I have always liked is the one about the novice at the monastery on Mount Serat in Spain. One of the fundamental requirements of this religious order is that the young men maintain silence.

Opportunities to speak are scheduled once every two years, at which time they are allowed to speak only two words. This particular initiate was invited

by his superior to make his first two-word presentation upon completion of his first two years at the monastery.

"Food terrible," he said.

Two years later the invitation was extended once again. The young man used this forum to exclaim, "Bed lumpy." Arriving at his superior's office two years later he proclaimed, "I quit."

The superior looked at the young monk and said, "You know, it doesn't surprise me one bit. All you've done since you arrived is complain, complain, complain."

So while this story may be narrowly focused on the error in complaining, the truth is that over and above keeping his own counsel, the British butler works efficiently to remedy situations, without troubling the employer with the details. He doesn't waste his breath complaining about something that is essentially within his own power to resolve.
We all know that butlers persevere. In fact, the title of this lecture is, "The Indomitable British Butler." An *interesting* choice of word, which I confess I had no part in selecting, "indomitable" means "strong, brave, determined and difficult to defeat, subdue or make frightened."

While I often pose like a body builder in front of the mirror, and strut about like Anthony Robbins, cajoling myself into assume these very qualities, I seem to find the only thing that is indomitable about myself is a Falstaffian belly with ever-expansive ideas of it's newfound role in my life.

"Indomitable" is derived from a Latin word meaning "not to be tamed," and while I have learned a healthy respect for people with "abs of steel," I am not sure that British Butlers as a whole find themselves so endowed.

But I digress again. There is something indomitable about British butlers, and I imagine you'd like to know what it is. Is it the persistence shown by Stevens, the butler in Ishiguro's masterful work, "The Remains of the Day"? Stevens is a character who stands by his employer through good times and bad. Loyal to the point of self-denial, he does not even allow his own father's death to interfere with his duties. Perhaps it is this loyalty that we admire in the doting, old retainers of yore.

My idea of indomitable in relation to butlers is somewhat more insouciant, however, focused on winning with a sparkle in one's eye, not enduring. Take the time Nicolo Paganini was performing with a full orchestra before a packed house in Italy. His technique incredible, his tone beautiful, his fingers flying over the strings, he enthralled the audience. Suddenly, in the midst of an unbelievably complex and fast moving composition, a string on his violin snapped and hung limply from his instrument. Paganini frowned briefly, shook his head, and continued to play, improvising beautifully. Then to

everyone's surprise, a second string broke, and shortly thereafter, a third. Instead of leaving the stage, Paganini calmly completed the piece on the one remaining string…

It is the command of all things in the household, a certainty of performance and a determination to carry through with dignity, which marks the British butler as the Indomitable One. As an aside, the strange preoccupation of murder mystery writers with the butler's guilt is perhaps not so far-fetched if one consider that the butler knows more than anyone else about the household, and this knowledge, coupled with impure motives, might well make him the number one suspect. In the same way, the term "knows where all the bodies are buried," was first used in the 1941 film, *Citizen Kane*, when Kane's estranged wife suggests to investigators, in reference to the butler. "He knows where all the bodies are buried." How true. And about all the skeletons in the closet, too. But about all these things, his stiff upper lip is remains permanently sealed. In returning briefly to the concept of dignity, perhaps I can draw from words Ishiguro puts into Stevens' mouth.

"Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is like playing some pantomime role; a small push, a slight stumble, and the facade will drop off to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone. It is, as I say, a matter of 'dignity.'"

In addition to "indomitability" and "professionalism," I'd like to throw some other long words at you, taken from *The British Butler's Bible*, because like this lecture today, I was running out of time earlier this week when preparing this talk and needed something to crib, nowadays done by the simple expedient of cutting and pasting from one document to another. Being a book, the information is delivered with greater intensity, so please excuse the change in style while I rattle off the basic attributes of a butler. You won't need to take notes, as you'll be acquiring a copy of the book later—or so my astrologist assures me.

Trustworthiness is the most basic trait that characterizes a British butler. An employer relies on honesty and reliability when he hands over his house, family, finances, and possessions to a Butler. He doesn't want his possessions disappearing, chores left undone, family sickened from food poisoning or funds being diverted. He does not want to be talked about behind his back or slandered to family and guests, nor to see his name in print via the Butler—so loyalty is another key ingredient, as covered earlier. He does not wish to be upstaged by the Butler, or big emergencies made out of small ones. So the Butler is always in the background, smoothing things over and

seeking to make his employer's life as pleasurable as possible. To "butle" successfully, one has to be willing to cause things quietly and let the boss take the credit; or conversely, take the blame in public for a boss's goof, without becoming defensive. One is, in essence, an actor on the stage, playing a part to perfection. As long as one keeps this in mind, the occasional indignities become part of the script and not a life-and-death matter. The employer would like to feel that his Butler really cares for his welfare and that of his family. He wants his Butler to be helpful and willing—a "can-do" type who wants things to work out for the family and who helps them wherever possible.

The Butler has to have some social graces—tactful when confronted with tricky situations so that family and guests are not made to feel uncomfortable. He knows and follows the accepted manners and customs; he keeps track of likes and dislikes of family and guests ("*Favorites*" in the Starkey parlance) and obliges them accordingly; he treats each person individually and with equal dignity, no matter how bizarre they may appear.

In time, he becomes almost as well loved as the rest of the family, but only when he conducts himself as if he is not; because there is an invisible line that he cannot cross. Today, especially, the upstairs and downstairs division (or "back" and "front," as it used to be known in country houses, in contrast to smaller, city dwellings) reflects a familial boundary, more than a societal one. Caring is therefore felt and shown, but always with a certain measure of decorum. Familiarity breeds contempt in the long run, so a British Butler maintains a professional demeanor at all times. It is a matter of actually caring, while maintaining a certain friendly formality in his actions. Being chummy and being impersonal are two extremes, neither of which work for a stranger allowed into the closeness of the nest.

By keeping track of his employer's penchants and moods, he can predict and provide the item or environment that his employer needs before being asked for it. The Butler's attitude is "I am going to do whatever I can to make my employer comfortable and happy." It's a game he plays and the rewards are pleasing to both himself and the employer.

A fundamental distinction is that a good Butler serves, but is not servile. He is there to provide a service that he enjoys delivering. He is willing to accept criticism, and if not justified, to let it ride, or correct it where and when appropriate. But he no longer owes his continued existence to his employer and so can walk tall, if discretely! Whereas he is flexible about the amount of time he works, he is most punctilious about timing, never being late. With regard to other staff in the household, he is also friendly without being too familiar. He is firm about the amount and quality of work done. He cares as well for the staff, that their lives are running well, remembering birthdays and the like.

He is a good organizer, who can manage many people and activities according to a schedule, while keeping up with all the paperwork. As covered earlier, he pays great attention to detail so as to achieve high standards and so essentially communicates an aesthetic message to his employer, the family and any guests. For instance, breakfast could be some greasy overcooked eggs served on a cracked, cold plate by an unshaven, unkempt Butler with a cigarette stub sticking from his lips and a body odor more in place at a zoo. Or it could be a plate of perfectly fried eggs, bacon, mushrooms and grilled tomatoes as the third course in a breakfast that is served on a sunlit balcony by a Butler in morning coat and pinstripes. He offers more hot coffee and the morning's newspapers and all the while, music is playing softly in the background. That's the level of creativity the good British Butler deals in: the making of beautiful moments to put people at their ease and increase their pleasure. At the same time, he has to deal with the raw emotions of upset staff, imperious family members, discourteous guests, indignant bosses, shifty contractors and the best-laid plans falling apart at the last moment—all the while maintaining his composure, his desire to provide the best possible service, and ensuring events turn out satisfactorily. He is much like the proverbial sergeant in the army—the one who organizes the men and actually meets the objectives, sometimes despite the commissioned officers. And at the end of the day, the good Butler still has the energy and humility to ask, "Was there anything I could have improved about my service today?"

There is a bit of the British Butler in everyone—the honesty, the creativity, the caring, the social graces, the phlegmatic; it is rare to find someone with all these qualities, who is able to keep them turned on, day in, day out, despite all the reasons not to. All of which reinforces the value of the British Butler in all his various manifestations and no matter where he finds himself serving.

It is worth pointing out that the Butlers most people see on the silver screen do not usually demonstrate many of the qualities listed above. When Blackadder makes disparaging and scathing remarks to the Prince of Wales' face or behind his back, he may be funny, but he is not being an honest-to-goodness British Butler that any employer would keep for very long—possibly because employers are never quite as naively daffy as they are made out to be in the various media, despite what the following stereotypical story illustrates:

"The wife of a newly-rich Silicon Valley millionaire checked into a hospital for some minor surgery. When the anesthesiologist told her she was going to have a local anesthetic. Her reply was, "Oh, my husband can afford it, order something imported."

To be sure, a British Butler will meet many a situation that challenges his idea of what is sensible. The first Duchess of Marlborough, for example, economized on ink by not dotting her i's or using full stops. Does it need to

be said that a sensible Butler will be sensible in dealing with such peccadilloes—that he will refrain from pointing out that the one penny saved each year in ink is uncomfortably offset by the thousands of pounds lost from upset recipients of her letters who no longer want to do business with her, or her husband, because her strange vocabulary and run-on sentences make her sanity somewhat suspect?

So, in closing, I would like to offer an idea for a basic drill to acquire the key characteristics of the British Butler. You don't have to be British, your lip does not have to be any stiffer than normal, and mustaches are optional.

I am referring to the ability to confront or face up to life's situations. A person whose attention is dispersed, thinking of problems or day-today affairs, is not at home, to speak. His (or her) observation of the environment is lacking, because his attention is turned inward, even if to some slight degree. If he cannot observe, he cannot compute properly because he lacks the relevant information on the environment he should be computing upon. And therefore he cannot act appropriately.

Additionally, the ideal condition for a butler to be in, is interest**ed** in the environment and others. If he is being interest**ing**, his attention is on himself, trying to attract attention to himself. I am sure you can see the distinction, one first made by Mr. L. Ron Hubbard.

I think you will find that the mastery of the situation, the unflappable panache of the British butler, is entirely dependent upon Being There as the starting point. The movie of that name gives some idea of the magic that "being there" can awaken.

As we draw to the end of our allotted time together, I would like to spend a few minutes practicing this little drill. Please team up in pairs, and turn your seats to face each other.

Now, just sit comfortably and look at or observe the other person. There is no need to be interest**ing**. You are interest**ed** in the other person. There is no need to smile, entertain or impress the other person, or exhibit any social graces. You are just concerned with being there. It's a simple but powerful truth. Let's try it for a few minutes!

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Very good. How did you do?

[Historical note: Three of the sets of people who did this exercise out of the hundred people in attendance reached such a level of equanimity with their randomly selected partner that they struck up a close personal relationship subsequently. Not that this is the goal of the drill at all (it was developed by Mr. Hubbard as the first step in communicating effectively

— *see* http://www.scientologyhandbook.org/SH5.HTM*), but it shows what can happen when one just sits down and is interested in, rather than trying to be interesting.]*

And so ends this presentation.

If anyone has any questions, I'd be glad to take them. If you have any comments, I prefer to take them with a stiff upper lip rather than on the chin.

Archduke, ladies and gentlemen, it has been my pleasure. Thank you.