

# YOUR CAREER

## Housekeeping 101

Clean your way to career development.

By Ann C. Logue

Are you wondering how housekeeping can be an appropriate career topic? Don't fire off a letter to the editor just yet. The state of your house *can* affect your career options. I know of people who are reluctant to telecommute because they're held hostage by the dishes in the sink. Others are afraid to invite colleagues, clients, or their boss over for dinner because of the mildew in the bathtub. And who among us hasn't called in sick to straighten up the house before weekend guests arrive?

We've all experienced how personal pressures can spill over to our jobs. So, if you're arguing with family members over piles of dirty laundry or rugs that need to be vacuumed, or if you view your hard-earned free time as being devoted solely to the drudgery of dusting, you're not going to be as productive at work.

Work-life balance issues cost businesses time and money, either indirectly through lost productivity or directly

through employee assistance programs and mental health expenditures. Thus, it makes sense for the business world to address everyday stressors, such as house-keeping, that generate anxiety in people and distract them from their work.

Most work-life programs don't address those type of issues. Instead, they're driven by life events such as the birth of a child (child-care) or the aging of a parent (elder-care). So says Mary Hunt of Home Advantage Plus, which offers employee training in household management to such companies as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Chubb Insurance.

Companies that recognize the impact of daily life issues on employees are ahead of the curve. But don't despair if your organization hasn't caught on. Here are some tips and resources for managing housework; perhaps they might wow your visiting boss or launch a successful home business.

**Get your priorities straight.** You don't have to be Martha Stewart, says Hunt. People often watch her shows and set their expectations too high. Instead of trying to make your house look like a Pottery Barn catalogue, think about what really matters to you and your family. Do you want to bounce a quarter off the bedspreads, or would it be enough for your kids to make their beds every morning? Do you want a spotless house, or would you settle for a front room clean enough for unexpected visitors?

**Get organized.** Assess which skills you bring to the workplace—for example, organization or time management—and apply those to your life at home. Hunt advocates planning by the week. Pick one day to go grocery shopping, one or two days for laundry, and so forth. That will help take the pressure off, she says, and you won't feel like you have to do everything every day.

## Top Five Tips

**1.** If your kitchen or bathroom sink smells, pour in a half-cup of baking soda and then follow it with one cup of household vinegar. After the solution foams, run cold water in the sink for at least 30 seconds.

**2.** Dust regularly, not just for cleanliness but also for your health. Use a lint-free cloth (avoid old t-shirts and rags) dampened with dusting spray or water. Dust in a circular direction so that you don't retrace areas.

**3.** Keep a basket in each room to collect clutter you don't have time to put away. Sort through it when you have a few minutes; otherwise, stow it.

**4.** When doing dishes, wash glasses and silverware first so they have the cleanest water. The hotter the water, the better the chance that those items will dry without streaks.

**5.** Are your kids not putting their clothes away? Perhaps they can't reach the rods in the closet. Lower the rods or hang hooks that the kids can reach.

◀ Sources/ [heloise.com](http://heloise.com),  
[homeadvantageplus.com](http://homeadvantageplus.com),  
[homemadesimple.com](http://homemadesimple.com),  
[marthastewart.com](http://marthastewart.com),  
[thecleanteam.com](http://thecleanteam.com)

Hunt also suggests that you set aside a small amount of time each day to clean so you can keep your weekends free. And do as the professionals do: Identify the tools you need, and keep them in one place. Fill a bucket or an apron with your rags, spray bottles, old

toothbrushes, and other small tools. Carry the kit around as you move from room to room. To make the job more pleasant, Hunt recommends listening to a book on tape, your favorite CD, or a baseball game on the radio.

**Keep a few tricks up your sleeve.** Your persnickety aunt just called and said she's only a few miles away? Don't panic. Set a timer for 15 minutes, Hunt suggests, then pick up the clutter only from the rooms your company will use. And don't be above subterfuge. Spray some furniture polish or liquid cleaner in the guestroom so the first thing your aunt notices is the smell of clean. Professional cleaners use that trick. (Murphy's Oil Soap in the spray bottle smells nice.)

**Put your family to work.** Everyone who lives under your roof should do some housework, so delegate accordingly. Whoever takes a shower last can squeegee the walls or spray daily shower cleaner. A toddler wielding an electrostatic cloth can pick up a surprising amount of dust. A preschooler can make a game out of sorting socks, a middle-schooler can do laundry, and a teenager can at least keep the bedroom door shut. Be sure to use a lot of positive reinforcement; it's wise to overlook a less-than-perfect job for the greater good of long-term cooperation.

**Pass the buck.** If cleaning causes constant stress or battles among the people you live with, consider hiring it out if you can afford to. Paying a service every other week to keep your kitchen and bathrooms under control can greatly ease housework headaches. Or, consider hiring cleaners just before a big party or the arrival of a houseguest. That may be enough to lighten your load and free a vacation day for something you really want to do.

If you set your expectations reasonably, get organized, learn a few tricks, and enlist the help of others, you *can* get

this aspect of your life under control. It just might help advance your career. And that, as Martha Stewart would say, is a good thing.

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## Cleaning Emergency?

The Clean Team offers a free hotline for your tough cleaning questions. Call 1.800.717.CLEAN.

## MoreInfo

**Hints from Heloise** [www.heloise.com](http://www.heloise.com) She's kind, she's gentle, and she likes inexpensive solutions. This site has all you need to know about removing stains, cleaning up quickly, and saving money.

**Home Advantage Plus** [www.homeadvantageplus.com](http://www.homeadvantageplus.com) More suggestions from Mary Hunt, whose company offers corporate training programs on home management.

**Home Made Simple** [www.homemadesimple.com](http://www.homemadesimple.com) This site, produced by Procter & Gamble, promotes the company's products, but it also contains a lot of great advice on how to keep your house clean and organized with minimal effort.

**Martha Stewart** [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) Martha Stewart is someone's mother-in-law, but most likely she's not yours (phew). Click on "keeping" for more than you ever wanted to know about running your household.

**Speed Cleaning** [www.thecleanteam.com](http://www.thecleanteam.com) Jeff Campbell's housecleaning service trains its staff to clean efficiently. He has also written several books on the subject. Campbell's Website includes his rules for speed cleaning, which can help you dramatically reduce the time needed to keep your house sparkling.