



Please release me: career woman Sharon Walker (left) is liberated after delegating all those annoying, time-consuming wifely chores to Sue Reeve of Consider It Done JONATHAN EVANS

Like most busy professionals, Sharon Walker spends her 'free time' running errands and doing chores around the house. And frankly, she'd rather be living her life. Could the solution be to hire her very own 'better half'?

# Why every woman needs a wife

It's a terrible hassle, my life. First off, this article: there is a paper trail between the car, my office and my bedside table. Scribbled notes I'd like to refer to, but really can't face salvaging. Then there's my new computer; for some reason the screen has gone dark and I can't find the brightness button. There's a pile of laundry on my kitchen table, large, fluffy dust-balls under the bed and a row of scuffed shoes that really should be polished.

Usually I can tolerate this level of chaos - the hundreds of minor irritations that make up any busy woman's life. That is, I could, until now. You see, I am no longer the kind of woman who can put up with leaky shower-heads, coats with missing buttons, or "to do" lists stretching into the next millennium. My life has become a smoothly-oiled machine.

Not that I can take the credit. This miraculous transformation has not been my doing; it has all been the work of my new "wife", Sue Reeve. Sue has been my wife for nearly a week, and I'm not sure I can manage without her. You see, with Sue in my life, I can score hot tables in sexy restaurants at a moment's notice; I never have to listen to an automated voice on the telephone; never have to stand in queues at the supermarket or dry-cleaner - or anywhere, for that matter.

Indeed, I need never again do all those mind-numbingly dull jobs that somehow, without my ever volunteering for them ("School run? Ikea trip? Hoover the sitting room? Me please!"), have become my responsibility. What's more, as a result I will probably live a whole year longer.

The recent news that the stress of juggling home and career is killing married women - die, on average, a year before our single sisters (married men, on the other hand, live a year longer) - is no surprise to Sue. In fact, she has built a business off the back of it. She describes her company Consider It Done as "a PA service for busy people who are managing complex lives and need help to do it".

Sue and her team will wait in for the gas man, get your gutters fixed or research a family holiday. In short, all the things a good wife used to do before women got caught up in the time-consuming business of having a job.

As it turns out, the people most in need of a wife are women; 90 per cent of Reeve's clients are female. "They are the ones juggling house, family and career," she tells me.

She's right. Take me. I work four days a week. I have two children. I am busy. Yet it would never occur to my husband to sort out the insurance, or book the kids' swimming lessons, or pay the cleaner. This stuff isn't even on his radar. And if he's not going to do it, that leaves me.

At least, it did until now. Now, for the princely sum of £14 a day, I can have my very own wife. For an all-in subscription, Sue and her staff will be at my beck and call five days a week, nine hours a day. What's more, unlike me, who will blab about my husband's domestic shortcomings to anyone, Sue and team have signed something like the Official Secrets Act, forbidding them to reveal my slovenly domestic ways.

As "executive wives" go, Sue is star quality. With a background in project management and customer services at companies such as British Airways, Orange and Heathrow Express, her organisational skills are brilliant. All curly blond hair and neat efficiency, she arrives with a spreadsheet (a spreadsheet!) of tasks collated from our telephone conversation. I have just moved house and our first "date" takes place around my kitchen table, surrounded by cardboard boxes.

The list of tasks is long indeed. There is a ripped Galliano dress, which I don't trust my dry-cleaner to mend; a Prada bag with a broken clasp; and several pairs of shoes with broken buckles and heels. She has agreed to organise my shopping from Ocado (they've been shooting reminders into my e-mail box for a year, but after my first order got lost I never quite managed it again).

There's a chandelier to hang, keys to cut, passports to renew, and the glove box of my car is lost in a field somewhere in Somerset (don't ask) - enough yawning-inducing jobs to put a whole orgy to sleep. She has agreed to find someone to help with the school run, a new cleaner (mine quit six weeks ago) and a plumber.

But none of this is a problem for Sue. This is a woman who once rustled up 100 extras for a film with four days' notice. When



she tells me this, I raise the game; could she, I wonder, co-ordinate a christening - grandparents, church and several godparents who are rarely in the country at the same time? (I bought the invitations a year ago, but my son will be 17 before I get around to organising it myself.)

Then there are tasks I would genuinely like to do, but which never get off the bottom rung of the urgency ladder. I admit I feel not a little pathetic as I shove over boxes of family photos. What kind of woman am I, who can't make time to collate her own beloved children's photo albums? Oh well, never mind; when did my husband ever worry about such things?

When Sue leaves - three hours later - she's laden with enough junk for a small bring-and-buy sale. "I'm so sorry," I mutter, feeling a twinge of guilt. "Oh, it's wonderful that you could find such a variety of things for me to do," she says, sounding genuinely enthused. As she staggers away, I feel oddly elated, like I've had an Oxfam clearout, or watched an episode of *House Doctor*. I feel free.

By the time I arrive at work the next morning, Sue has already placed my Ocado order. (I let her decide what to buy. Why bother to think when you can delegate?) The day passes in a flurry of e-mails. She picks the best value of three decorating quotes within 30 minutes (something I could dither over for a week),

rounds up sponsors for my daughter's skipathon, deals with insurance companies and buys presents for children's birthdays.

The reaction to my new wife is overwhelmingly positive. "An executive wife? That sounds amazing," coos a mother Sue has contacted about the school run. "Will she sleep with your husband if you're really, really tired? That would be fantastic."

"I've got a wife," I tell my friend Kate. "I know," she says. "She e-mailed me about the christening. It's great. I knew I didn't have to be polite. I could just fire off 'yes' or 'no' answers. I wish I had one."

My daughter isn't so sure. "What's in the present?" she wants to know. "Um, a book by Madonna," I think. "Has it got pink on it?" I have to admit I don't know. I'd briefed Sue to buy a present suitable for a six-year-old girl; what I'd neglected to mention was that "girly-girl" pink is very uncool in my daughter Edie's class. The vicar is similarly suspicious. He wants to talk to me directly.

Considering we only met a week ago, and I have delegated almost total responsibility for my life, everything goes incredibly smoothly. Consider It Done's drop-off service arrives with wrapped presents for my brother-in-law's 40th. The dress, the shoes and the handbag have all been fixed, and at minimal cost (just £28 to take up an eight-metre chiffon hem and mend the torn waistline). Phil from Buzz Handyman has, among other things, secured the potentially lethal wardrobe to the wall, fixed a doorknob and disabled the waste disposal

(too dangerous for little fingers). Marigold Cleaners start next week. Staunch and Flow have been to quote for a new boiler and we have two possible dates for a christening - all without me lifting a finger or barely having to think. I have even let Sue pick out the best pictures from contact sheets of my parents-in-law's ruby wedding. Her brochure is

so stylish that I just know she has good taste.

Sue is nothing if not tenacious. Her complaint letter to British Gas (I'd paid the nanny to wait in from 8am till 2pm or even apologise) is a work of genius. It has just the right tone: a mix of hard-done-by loyal customer, with scary Rotweiler undertones.

Despite lobbying her 36 tasks in five days, as well as ringing her on a Saturday morning because I'd forgotten which present was which, I never once heard a martyring sigh.

It's shocking how quickly we have slipped into typical husband and wife roles. When Sue sends me a text reminding me that the passport forms have got to go off that day, I let out an exasperated wheeze, not unlike my husband when I remind him of things he has to do - "Hell, I can't believe she expects me to do this all by myself." In less than a week, I have become a spoilt man.

On the upside, my life is blissfully free of minor irritations. I've cleared a backlog of chores that were draining my energy and have more time to have fun with my husband and kids. We're even arguing less. Now, when my husband fires off one of those irritating texts - "Edie needs a green frog outfit by Friday!" - I don't get annoyed; I just send it to Sue.

Sadly, our week together is coming to a close. I really ought to say goodbye. It would be an amicable split; Sue's not the type to make a fuss. But I'm not ready to leave, not yet. Fortunately, Sue has a strategy for weaning wife-dependent women like me. With her Now And Again package, you buy time as you need it. With eight hours in the bank, I can relax. It's not a full-time wife, but it could be the start of a beautiful relationship.

See [www.consider-it-done.co.uk](http://www.consider-it-done.co.uk); 020-8742 8718. Joining fee, £255 plus VAT; unlimited subscription, £295 per month; Home Run, £160 plus VAT per month; Now And Then, £295 plus VAT for an eight-hour block.

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