



Concetto Marletta

After many years working in high-end hospitality for the likes of Claridge's and Mandarin Oriental (where he was photographed for *Robb Report*), personal adviser Concetto Marletta set up his own company, Totally Indispensable (TI), five years ago. His clients use TI for anything from arranging last-minute travel to – given his extraordinary fashion contacts – finding a unique *pièce d'occasion*. 'For example, one client's wife liked a Versace dress belonging to a three-year-old collection,' he says. 'I've been looking after the Versace family for 30 years, so I asked Donatella. She said, "No problem," and went into the archives. We then delivered the dress to Monaco.'

As there are now hundreds of concierge companies, Marletta opted for exclusivity: 'Instead of expanding, I became more expensive.' He closed down his restaurant wing, raised the annual membership fee and now his team of 11 looks after royal families, business people and fashion houses, including brands like Valentino. 'They keep us busy,' says Marletta. 'The other day I had to book *Rigoletto* at La Scala in Milan at the last minute.' It was tough, he says, but they pulled it off because TI has a network of contacts in ticket agencies – indeed, one client is ticketing agency ATG. So when one family wanted Justin Bieber tickets – and to meet the singer behind the scenes – the job was duly done. 'It's all about confidence, contacts and trustworthiness,' says Marletta. 'Without the latter, it won't work.'

some point in the early Noughties, he or she became a smart and soigné fixer, with firms like Quintessentially and Ten stepping up to the plate to service the needs of their clients wherever they were in the world.

Today's personal advisors represent a further evolution in lifestyle management. Cultured, connected, informed and insightful, they won't just make your life run smoothly, they'll curate experiences and furnish you with unique opportunities. Rather than managing your life, their mission is to enrich it. And crucially, they are often employed by large companies to provide extra lifestyle services to a top tier of clients.

As tempting as it might seem, just don't call them concierges, or even worse, fixers. Those antiquated labels don't do justice to these new ultra-discreet, 360-degree operatives. 'I prefer "family office",' says Charles Curran, director of White Circle Collection, referring to the generic term that denotes the management of lifestyle requirements – including investments, estate planning and philanthropy – for wealthy families. Others, meanwhile, call themselves private assistants. Alistair Morgan, CEO of Mayfair Private, started by law firm Mishcon de Reya in 2014 to offer non-investment, non-legal services to its family-office clients, defines his task as 'applying professionalism to private lives'; while Concetto Marletta of Totally Indispensable says, 'If there was another word I could use for "concierge", I would. Nor do I like "lifestyle management"'. Moreover, the new breed of advisor finds those old Noughties tales of flying cakes around the world, well, a bit vulgar.

For the most part, these new roles – however you want to label them – came into being for pragmatic reasons, as firms operating in the wealth arena recognised the need to utilise lifestyle management skills as a means of gaining traction with their clients. In property, for example, offering high-end services as part of a package is a big element of a new development's appeal. Hugo Peña, who operates the Portico guest services business at CIT's South Bank Tower, says that developers increasingly buy in branded lifestyle services as they not only add value, but also pizzazz. 'They bring soul into the life of the building,' he says. What's more, they also transform your new home into something akin to a luxury hotel.

It hardly needs saying that in this gilded world, privacy is key. Non-disclosure agreements are normally signed; long-term relationships usually prevail. Making this type of arrangement work is about gaining the trust of the unreachable, the off-Googles, the people so private they can't be emailed or phoned. For Concetto Marletta, the most important thing is that clients become

friends, or at least confidantes. 'But there's a boundary we never step over,' he counsels. 'They know we won't become a pain – and we always know when to step back.' It's almost like the old model of the lady-in-waiting, he adds – the idea of relying on strong personal links and implicit trust, but one that the corporate clients he sometimes consults for are keen to learn and deploy in their own working relationships with high-net-worth individuals. As an anonymous (obviously) client of Marletta's says, 'Service for me is all about time saving. When I need something, I call Concetto and I know he'll always get exactly what I'm looking for, whatever it is and wherever in the world I am.'

So, who takes on such a job? 'We do employ people of a certain background,' says Curran. 'They can't be impressed by wealth.' Often, they will already have proved themselves at the top

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end of the hospitality industry. What is certain is that there are rich pickings in London, where more billionaires reside than in any other city in the world. As a result, there's been a huge rise in the number of individuals and organisations offering this type of service, with varying levels of expertise. So how many firms are there now? 'Hundreds,' says Marletta, with a withering sigh.

At the more rarified end of the spectrum are the life curators whose primary role is to deploy their connections and insight to open up various opportunities – cultural, professional, personal – for their high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth clients. Leading companies have segued into this type of service in order to strengthen relationships and create feedback loops with their most valued customers. In the banking sector, for example, Barclays has led the charge with its Little Book of Wonders digital lifestyle service, full of events and articles that resonate with their private banking clients. 'This isn't a concierge service,' says Victoria Bennett, head of marketing, wealth and investment management at Barclays. 'It's the opposite, really. We pre-empt our clients with invitations and ideas that we know will suit them,' she says. These might take the form of



getting behind the wheel of an F1 car or learning about philanthropic giving over dinner – fun on one level, a kind of high-end knowledge exchange on another.

It's a similar story at auction house Christie's, where the head of client advisory Isabelle de La

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Bruyère has developed strong relationships with clients as they've built their collections. 'Art is very personal, it needs a human touch,' she says. 'You inevitably get to know your clients and their families well. You become friends, so naturally you end up telling them about shows you think they might like or restaurants they'd enjoy.'

True to the classic model of the modern-day life curator, de La Bruyère's team wasn't specifically introduced to provide lifestyle management services – rather, these have organically become part of the overall package. The net result is that, in addition to providing advice on art and collectibles, de La Bruyère's office is on hand to ease travel arrangements, secure private viewings and open all manner of significant doors for clients. They might even help you buy a last-minute gift.

The new private advisor needs great contacts, then, but also high emotional intelligence, particularly when faced with a challenging request. Hugo Peña once took a call from a panicked client who couldn't get through UK border control. Curran has helped a client get a divorce. Others have been called upon to organise funerals. Generally speaking though, what busy individuals require most urgently is anxiety reduction. Marletta, for example, has a policy of making informed choices on behalf of his clients. 'So if a family goes to the Mediterranean and we know they want a seven-bedroom villa with a boat, instead of going back to them with a selection of 10 villas, we do thorough research and come back with two perfect options.' That means so much more than bagging a table at Sexy Fish. ●

Victoria Bennett

When Barclays set up Little Book of Wonders in 2012 (working with the publishers of *Robb Report UK*), Victoria Bennett was brought in to manage this luxury lifestyle service, whose website carries a mix of editorial features and events. Barclays was the first financial organisation to offer such a service, which has increased interaction between clients and the bank. 'We had ad hoc partnerships,' says Bennett (photographed at Shangri-La Hotel, at The Shard), 'but we saw a chance to formalise these for the benefit of our clients and leverage our network of more than 200 partners.'

Little Book of Wonders is invitation-only, available to around 5,000 Barclays Wealth and Investment Management clients in the UK. The events offer a way for Barclays to get to know clients better. 'Recently we've had a private dinner in the Churchill War Rooms, front-row seats at London Fashion Week, a talk with Sebastian Coe – even coding for children.' The nature of the service allows Bennett and her team to play to clients' interests, 'be they architecture, art, food and wine or cars. Little Book of Wonders mirrors market changes but we don't run events about investments. It's a curated lifestyle service, not an events booking machine.'