

R A N D O M W A L K

Ask for an elephant, whaddya get? A camel



BY PAUL
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CONCIERGE SERVICE IS QUITE the corporate perk these days.

Imagine having someone to help you indulge any whim—so long as it isn't illegal, immoral or unkind.

And not just any ordinary helper, but someone with can-do moxie and a golden Rolodex.

So, why do concierges spend most of their time making dinner reservations or standing in line for a Metra pass?

Why settle for someone to drop off your dry cleaning when, for instance, you can ask for a live owl to be delivered to a third-grade classroom, as one Andersen Consulting employee did.

After two years of offering subsidized concierge services to some 4,500 employees around the country, Andersen found that only 800 per month use the services—and most simply want help with routine chores.

"It's an opportunity to gain a couple of hours during the day," says Cheryl Justak, Andersen's manager of concierge services.

But that's like having a Ferrari in the garage and only using it to commute in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

The well-kept secret is that concierges love a challenge—almost as much as they

love swapping stories about it afterward.

"To us it's not, 'Ha ha ha, is this a joke?'" says Olga Pierce, president of Concierge Unlimited International (CUI) and a 25-year veteran of the Chicago concierge scene. "It's, 'When do you want it?'"

To jump-start some creative thinking, here are some of the more unusual tasks that Chicago concierges have been asked to perform:

A party planner requested an elephant for a Christmas holiday event in downtown Chicago. But elephants can't tolerate subzero temperatures. "We didn't get an elephant, but we got a camel," says Ms. Pierce.

Ticket requests are routine, but concierges can perform magic—like producing backstage passes to an Eric Clapton concert—as long as money is no object. One CUI client even got an audience with the pope.

"I can put you on the floor during the Bulls playoffs if you can pay for it," boasts Angie Vasic, CUI's head concierge at the USG/AT&T building.

Ah, but can she assure us that Michael Jordan will be playing?