



here comes a point in the life cycle of many female celebrities when they decide to start doling out advice. This usually coincides with the moment the heady cocktail of a glittering career, successful marriage and doting motherhood all come together at precisely the same moment. Just take a look at Lisa B, Myleene Klass, Jools Oliver and, most recently, Mrs Chris Martin. The internet is Gwyneth's forum, and from her rather unappetisingly named website, Goop.com, she lets us into the secret of her gorgeous life. "I want to nourish what is real," she coos, urging the rest of us to "make your life good. Invest in what's real". Her gurus recommend eight hours of sleep a night, 10 hours' fasting after your last meal and eschewing of white foods. That is on top of all the macrobiotic food, karmic chanting and killer heels, of course.

The website has the effect of making any "normal" working mother realise two things: one, that she is just a touch inadequate because she doesn't have a sage, and two, celebrity motherhood must be a completely different experience to normal motherhood, which encompasses a daily battle with lost book bags, unlearnt spelling tests, mounting anxiety about the nutritional value of fizzy Haribos and a continual and violent campaign against head lice. (In my experience, the head lice usually win hands down.) Is this what Gwyneth would describe as "nourishing what is real"? Presumably she has time to nourish the real because she has a small army of staff to help her. Because what most of us really need is not another page of celebrity babble, but a PA.

Step forward the Mummy PA. Lifestyle management is not a new industry, with companies such as Quintessentially.com, the "24-hour global concierge service", at the top end of the market, but Sue Reeve, the founder of Consider It Done, aims to provide a more affordable service to mothers desperately in need of an extra pair of hands. Her subscription for eight hours a month, in slots that can be as short as five minutes to organise the perfect bouquet of flowers, starts at £295, and she now has 100 clients, mostly women. "The brunt of household management still falls to women," says Reeve. "And when you combine that with a busy career and children, it's hardly surprising people need to call in help to manage the demands of daily life. Lifestyle management isn't confined to the lives of celebrities."

She has been asked to hire live insects for a bug-themed party, find a baby-yoga class, buy 60-denier brown tights for a Christmas-pudding costume and find a nursery night-light in the shape of a pig. "My life would be very much more complex without the help of Sue," says one client, a marketing executive with two young children who spends a percentage of the week travelling for work. "Not everything she does for me

is related to the children. She might sort out all my travel plans for the month, so I've then got more time to spend with my kids. I feel like I can offload a lot of administrative tasks, which takes a huge strain off me and helps me concentrate on the things that matter."

One particularly well-organised client even e-mails Reeve a spreadsheet every autumn with a list of all her nieces and nephews who need presents for Christmas, including their interests and what they received last year. Reeve then buys, wraps and posts the presents, complete with a handwritten card from the client in each. Another enlisted a Mummy PA to organise her son's christening. "We did everything from booking the church to sending invitations and organising the caterers and the reception afterwards," says Reeve. "I think the priest was a bit surprised, but I know that it took the strain off the client, and that's what I'm here for."

It is a neat concept, but it also feels a touch disconcerting. Isn't there something ludicrously decadent about paying someone else to shop for presents for you, especially with the credit crunch on our doorstep? I decided to book Reeve for a working day to find out. I wanted her to sort out my office, which was a complete mess, and more generally alleviate the strain of running a busy career with two very, very busy children. When she arrived, I felt soothed by her nannyish aura. I was initially worried there was going to be some slight tut-tutting at my disorganisation, but she was reassuring and calm, so I didn't feel remotely embarrassed. The real challenge, however, was delegating the work to her. While I am perfectly at home multitasking, I felt a certain sense of shame as I guided Reeve through the inside of my filing cabinet, telling her everything she needed to do, but she didn't flinch.

As the week progressed, I realised that a PA is not just a luxury, but actually an essential. I e-mailed her lists of tasks I imagined would take weeks, but were pinged back to me hours later: menu plans for my children, names of places to buy that elusive school shirt, activities to fill the gaping days of half term, a French tutor. She sorts out my mobile-phone contract, retrieves my passport, which has got lost at the Indian High Commission, finds someone to deliver a load of logs from a sustainable source, files a box of receipts that I would have probably mislaid otherwise. These are activities I can easily put off for months, sometimes even years, but they need to be done. And for the first time I can remember, I find that I have some spare time. My office, too, is almost unrecognisable. Books are stacked and arranged alphabetically. A new filing system is in place; there are even a few laminated files on my desk.

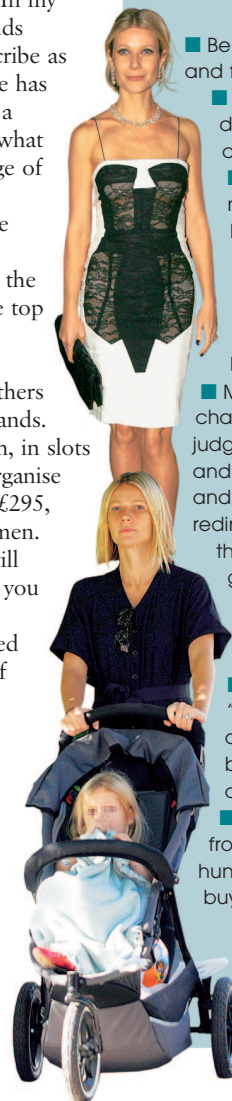
Now that I have all this spare time on my hands, I guess all I really need is for Reeve to fix me a lunch date with Gwyneth. □

Mummy PA is a service offered by Consider It Done Lifestyle Management Ltd; 020 8742 8718, consider-it-done.co.uk

## GWYNETH SAYS

- Be in spaces that are clean and feel nice.
- Police your thoughts and deal with your feelings constructively.
- Returning to a more natural way of eating is the best way to avoid disease and premature ageing. It also keeps the weight off.
- Work out and stick with it.
- Visit a city you have never been to before.
- Most of the background chatter in our mind is worrying, judging, criticising, defending and complaining. Catch yourself and create a distraction by redirecting your thoughts toward the things that you are grateful for and optimistic about.
- Don't forget to nourish your soul.
- The future of medicine is "no medicine". If we return to a more natural life, our bodies become the best doctors.
- We used to pick our food from trees and the earth and hunt or fish the rest. Now we buy it in modern supermarkets.
- Don't be lazy. Learn something new.

Taken from goop.com



OPHELIA WYNNIE, X-POSURE

# THE MUMMY TRAP

MOTHERHOOD, MACROBIOTIC DIETS AND ME TIME OUGHT TO BE POSSIBLE FOR EVERY WOMAN, SAYS GWYNETH. INTERESTING THEORY, SAYS CLOVER STROUD

