

personal services

revolutionizing
time

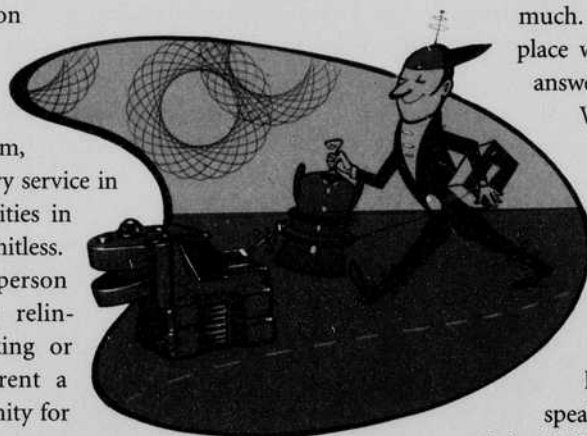
WITH WALL STREET FIRMS AND SILICON VALLEY TECH COMPANIES battling to find qualified candidates, perks like in-house concierges, chefs, and on-site child care have become common. But you don't have to work in high tech or finance to take advantage of such services. Both online and off, a boom in personalized service has manifested itself in the form of personal trainers, financial advisors, even people to do your errands. The common link among these services is that they save you time. "Technology is enabling people to buy quality products, get quality services, and save time," says Alison Berglund, vice president of marketing and business development for HomeRuns.com, a pioneer online grocery service in Boston. The opportunities in this field are nearly limitless. Any activity that a person would be happy to relinquish—like dog walking or standing in line to rent a movie—is an opportunity for a personal service company.

"In our case, everybody buys groceries, so you've got a huge market and you've got products that people need on a regular basis. Instead of going to the store, parking, and waiting in line, however, we're offering a service in the convenience of your home," explains Berglund. This opportunity to combine quality and convenience is what drives an ever-expanding circle of services that people will some day take for granted.

Amy Wood, 29, director of web experience for HomeRuns, came to the company after working as a

store manager for Hannaford Brothers, HomeRuns' one-time parent company. "Because it's a mature industry, supermarkets don't change much. To come in and work at a place where no one had any of the answers was pretty attractive," says Wood, a graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Berglund adds that because a majority of personal service companies deal with inventory and people—HomeRuns has over 400 employees, speaking a total of nine languages, in its fulfillment center—there is a terrific opportunity to learn management skills.

HomeRuns is a relative giant in this industry, but most personal service businesses can be run by a small group of people, depending on the service. Naturally, personal service requires people with customer service skills, not simply someone with a good idea that can save somebody time. Common entry-level jobs are in sales and customer service or delivery, unless you have a skill (like computer programming or accounting) that can help improve day-to-day operations. If you're starting a business yourself, be sure your killer personal service concept is based on a solid business plan.



new directions

(EPC), most environmental programs are administered at the local level, where governments may not know about other successful programs.

Stevenson's job is to find successful programs in her area of expertise (water conservation), create best-practice guides, and publish her findings on the center's web site as a resource for other professionals in the field. She has

recently turned her attention to Latin America, where environmental information-sharing networks are rare. In Mexico City, for example, motor vehicle emissions have polluted the air so badly that cars are banned on certain days of each week. Stevenson shares her findings with community leaders around the region via the Internet.

The continuing search for best prac-

tices demands excellent research and writing skills and a passion for the work, says Stevenson. She draws satisfaction from seeing so many people work to solve environmental problems, and she recognizes that such a level of collaboration wouldn't be possible without the web. "The idea behind my job is that we can get more done if we share information instead of reinventing the