

ROYAL FAMILY

# Prince William has hired a new valet. Here's what they'll do

Alexandra Parker-Larkin, a former valet, reveals what it's like to look after the rich and the titled



"A valet's job is to know everything about you – and then operate with the utmost discretion," says Alexandra Parker-Larkin

GETTY IMAGES; POSED BY MODEL

As told to [Elisabeth Perlman](#)

Wednesday March 20 2024, 12.01am, The Times

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**A** valet becomes your right-hand person, so I understand why Prince William has hired one. As part of the role, his valet is reportedly going to be responsible for the prince's clothing and appearance.

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# Times2

The valet's job is to know everything about you — and then operate with the utmost discretion. They are never judgmental. For the royals, having assistance of this kind is nothing new. They've been brought up with staff who would wake them, draw the curtains and run a bath.

I've spent six years, on and off, as a valet and 25 years in all in luxury hospitality. I now train valets for a domestic service agency in Mayfair, London.

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Prince William's new valet is reportedly responsible for his clothing and appearance

MAX MUMBY/INDIGO/GETTY IMAGES

My clients are predominantly over 50. They tend to be aristocrats, plus some rich Middle Eastern families. I've worked everywhere, including the Bahamas, the US and the UK. I've been in countryside residences where half the castle is full of the client's clothes and bags. I've seen walk-in fridges used to store fur coats.

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worked with a lot of people in their late twenties or early thirties who have made a lot of money very quickly.

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Valets predominantly refer to their client as their principal. You can also use first names, or Mr or Mrs followed by their surname. Sometimes madam is preferred. If they're royalty, you would use their title.

Just how meaningful the work can be became apparent to me when I was working for a very rich South American family. The principal's wife was very ill, which all the staff were made aware of. Even though she could be quite strict, I really liked her.

She had flown in the private jet to their weekend residence for a few days to enjoy the sunshine. Their trip came to an end on a Sunday and I had to get her ready to take the private jet back to the main residence to be taken to hospital or receive at-home care.

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I chose her outfit, put clean underwear on her, got her into the car and said goodbye. When the jet landed, we received news that she had died on the runway. I just remember my heart sinking and thinking, I was part of her final moments on earth. I had that privilege because of my role.

The work can be quite intense. Within large houses, clients usually have what they call their “apartments”. These are specific, often more private areas where the principal will want a small team of us to be. We’d be told to maintain that area — say the bedroom — for the rest of the day and no other staff members would be able to enter.

You’re expected to know where their hairbrush sits, what needs to be on their bedside table and the clothes to lay out on the bed when they come back from the gym. What a valet offers is this high level of personalised care and attention, beyond polishing shoes or steaming a garment before an event.

I’ve done seamstress work for clients, taking up a hem of a dress in a matter of minutes as well as mending zips and sewing on buttons. Some people might confuse the term “valet”, but it’s very different from a butler, who might greet guests and serve dinner.

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morning. You'd never ask: "Would you like your green tea now, madam?" If they look like they're getting ready ten minutes earlier one day, you would immediately call up the chauffeur. It has to seem as though the car has just magically appeared.

If you notice that every day when they have lunch they have a certain chilli paste, then you should even notice where they put it and make sure that it's always there when they sit down – at the top left hand side of their place setting. It's about mastering the personal touches and the finishing touches. Clients are looking for somebody to think for them – and the smallest things are actually the really important things.

It's a very good career. An experienced valet can expect to earn £76,000 and upwards annually. But you have to be the right kind of person. You have to be discreet and adaptable. You need to be someone who is willing to learn by making mistakes. Mistakes that can cost you your job at times. It's never cost me mine, but I've definitely made some big laundry blunders. I've shrunk many cashmere jumpers.



Alexandra Parker-Larkin: "The best valet pre-empt what their client needs"

My work now involves going into large estates to teach aspiring valets how to do this and other tasks. You also have to bear in mind that principals will have their preferences. Whether it's

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Your etiquette matters: you need to know how to greet guests — never turn your back to them. Don't open a door and then just walk away. You have to lead them through to the main room where they will be socialising, and introduce them to the host and the other guests. Be aware of correct terminology. In some cases guests have certain titles.

Every household has a chain of command, which you need to understand. If your client tells you they want a pedicure at 11am, you'd need to go to their PA and say, "Can you make this happen and come back to me?" rather than make the appointment for them yourself.

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Yet there are some principals who just want to deal with one person. I worked for somebody who had so many staff but didn't want to learn all their names. So he just used to call everybody Alex. The staff would know that if he said "Alex", whoever was close by would run to get me.

The principal wasn't being rude, it was just a case of — "I can't remember the other people's names and I need something now."

**Alexandra Parker-Larkin is training manager and head trainer at Polo & Tweed**

*As told to Elisabeth Perlman*

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- 1. Be honest.** You are in the job because they trust you. You are one of the people closest to them. But it's how you go about being honest that counts. "Madam, I love this new red lipstick, yet I feel with your outfit this light pink may be more suitable. It enhances your natural lip colour."
- 2. Be patient.** There may be several outfit changes, but being late is the least of their worries.
- 3. Be flexible.** Plans change, and you may be called in last minute to help.
- 4. Remain polite.** A compliment is always nice to receive and almost expected. However, consider the etiquette behind it. Don't go over the top, instead opt for a simple "You look lovely this evening, madam, blue is your colour".
- 5. Be on time or early for work, and remain calm at all times.** They might be stressed over the fact the zip just broke when putting on the dress and deep down inside you might be too. You have to not show this. Reassure them it's not a problem and you will have it fixed in no time.
- 6. You have to be part of the team that thinks ahead.** Calling the chef ahead of time to tell them you overheard the principals talking about how they invited the neighbours for dinner and advise them to prepare for more guests.

## Don't

- 1. Show shock or offer your opinion at something your principal says or does.**
- 2. Share inside stories.** Remember part of your job is to remain discreet. You are privy to all sorts of delicate information. This includes gossiping to other staff members too.
- 3. Let your principal attend an event or an occasion dressed inappropriately.** It's up to you to understand the dress code and etiquette of all of their social events. Advise them of

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such as being a seamstress. This could come back to haunt you if you are asked to alter the hem on a lavish ballgown at the last minute.

5. Say no when asked to do something. They don't like the word no. You should be well trained in problem-solving and coming up with an immediate solution.

6. Wash an item in the washing machine that is dry clean only or hand wash only. There are no shortcuts for some tasks.

Prince William

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Alexandra Parker-Larkin



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**Isobel Brown**

3 HOURS AGO



Glad to see the Times focussing on the important things in life. What a load of codswallop

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**John Brodie**

33 MINUTES AGO



But a laugh. Must get better at the toothpaste technology.

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**C** **Chris Frankland** ...  
 8 HOURS AGO

Disappointed to see that squeezing toothpaste onto the brush is not in the list.

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**M** **M Adams** ...  
 44 MINUTES AGO

..

What you're obviously referring to is the rumours re the then Prince Charles and his valet.

What is seldom mentioned is that this happened only during a period when Charles was recovering from a broken arm caused by a horse fall whilst playing polo.

..

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**C** **C Bevan** ...  
 3 HOURS AGO

I could not stand someone fussing about me like this, as if I were a baby bird that had fallen out of the nest and couldn't do anything for myself.

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**C** **C Rodda** ...  
 4 HOURS AGO

I'd hope my valet would draw a bath rather than run one.

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**F** **FToki** ...  
 6 HOURS AGO

Perhaps William is shifting into high gear as Charles is indisposed

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costumes.

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**A**

**Anya May**

7 MINUTES AGO

What, suits in varying colours?

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**P**

**Phil Rogers**

1 HOUR AGO

I now train valets for a domestic service agency in Mayfair, London.

A school for flunkies. How quaint !

*(Edited)*

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**S**

**Stephen Green**

1 HOUR AGO

After reading this piece, I came to the conclusion that these 'principals' are in serious need of medical help.

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**J**

**John Almond**

1 HOUR AGO

As millions starve in Sudan, including 16 million children, The Times decides that we need to know the tension that can be created by a broken zip. Dress yourself and mend your own (expletive) zip.

*(Edited)*

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**C**

**Chris Frankland**

1 HOUR AGO

Zip your lip, Times!

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I secretly want a valet now. To have a person in my life that never says no, and who helps me look less like a scruffy academic without telling me off for fashion mistakes like my daughter does would be excellent.

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**Christopher Yonge**

9 HOURS AGO



I've never known whether the correct pronunciation in the UK and in the US is "valett" or "valey". Any suggestions?

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**Chris Frankland**

8 HOURS AGO



What an interesting and absorbing question. Should keep Times readers occupied for hours.

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↩ 1 reply



**S Burrell**

32 MINUTES AGO



'Obsequious craven idiot'

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