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practical matters

Another fine mess to get yourself out of

TIPS FOR SELECTING THE RIGHT HOME-CLEANING SERVICE

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You've had a 10-hour day at the office, but cheer up: When you get home, you can mop the floors!

OK, perhaps something more enjoyable is in order. Laundry? Dishes? You know, the kitty litter hasn't been changed in a while...

Nobody likes to find a mountain of chores waiting at home, but finding a reliable, efficient cleaning service can be challenging. Eileen Koff, a professional organizer who owns To the Next Level in Stony Brook, has on many occasions searched for cleaning professionals on behalf of her clients.

"Finding a good cleaner that is reliable and fair-priced is a hard endeavor," Koff said. "But the good ones are out there, and if you

keep looking, you will find one."

Koff is full of ideas that might help your search. To find a cleaning service or individual housecleaner, ask your friends and neighbors who they use, and if they're happy with the provider's work. And because costs can vary widely, get at least three cleaners to come to your home to give you an estimate. If they're unwilling to come in person to quote you a price, Koff

said, don't hire them.

"Your square footage isn't like someone else's square footage," she noted. "You might, for instance, have a Jacuzzi tub, and

they might charge you extra for it. They have to see what's going on in your house before they tell you what

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Courtesy of Eileen Koff

It's not easy to find good help these days, according to Eileen Koff of To the Next Level in Stony Brook.

they will charge."

The amount of clutter and the number of pets in a house may also affect the rate, as may the frequency with which you employ cleaners. If, for instance, the cleaner comes weekly, it may cost less than if the cleaner comes biweekly or monthly.

Koff also suggested that you determine a service's payment structure up front, and when comparing rates get an itemized list of what's included. Typical basic services include dusting;

scrubbing bathroom and kitchen fixtures, appliances and countertops; and mopping and vacuuming. Some services – such as laundry, or cleaning windows, carpets or refrigerators – may cost extra.

“Find out exactly what’s expected for the price,” Koff said. “For instance, will they vacuum the drapes? The baseboards?”

Also, find out if the cleaner will bring all cleaning materials, or if you must provide them. There are some cleaning products that are gentler on the environment and healthier to use in the home, particularly for people with allergies or asthma, and if this is important to you, find out if the cleaner is willing to use these products – “it may mean an extra scrub on their part” – and whether you will have to provide them, Koff said.

Ask housecleaning services you interview if they are bonded and insured, which will protect you against theft, breakage or injury to one of their workers inside your home, Koff noted, and ask to see the supporting documentation.

You may also want to find out how the service’s employees are screened and trained, and if they will send the same person or people to your house every time. Because they have less overhead, independent housecleaners can be significantly less expensive than cleaning services, but bear in mind that if you hire someone to work in your



Photo courtesy of To The Next Level

house and you control how the work is done, the IRS considers that person to be your employee.

According to IRS Publication 926, if you pay your employee \$1,500 or more

in wages a year, you must withhold and pay Social Security and Medicare taxes. Further, you are legally responsible for ensuring that the individual is allowed to work in the United States.