

I

t sounds like a visit from a gumshoe: someone slips into your home, sifts through your things, combs your carpet, dusts — but not for fingerprints.

After all, your visitor isn't some sort of sleuth, but a housecleaner. And the housecleaner hasn't come to gather the dirt on you, but simply to gather your dirt.

But doesn't it *feel* funny?

"It can," says Brenda Stadnik, owner of Brenda's Cleaning Personnel in San Rafael. "You're dealing with your personal things in your personal house. How many people invite friends in to touch their personal things?"

MAKING A GOOD, CLEAN LIVING

Not many. That's why psychology figures heavily in the success of her business, which readers of the *Pacific Sun* voted "The Best Housecleaning Service in Marin County 1991." Energy and precision also help — as does a sense of humor.

It's late Monday morning at company headquarters, and the auburn-haired Stadnik, dressed simply in a pleated wool skirt and sweater, is ricocheting around the sparse two-room office like a pinball. Employee Irene Paul is planted in "the hot seat," strategically positioned in front of the computer and telephones. (Only Sir Nicholas, an 8-year-old Maltese who serves as company mascot, is dogging it.) The computer had been on

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Brenda Stadnik and Irene Paul: Energy, precision and a sense of humor keep Brenda's Cleaning Personnel on top of the housecleaning business.



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the fritz, and its return to health has inspired jubilation. "You have to be able to laugh," Stadnik says, about the crazy pace of the work. "You laugh or you die."

She runs her business like an employment agency, booking work for about 35 housecleaners in various homes. Clients pay \$12.75 an hour, with \$9 going to the cleaner, \$3.75 to the agency. It sounds simple, but the trick is matching the right cleaner to the right cleanee. Says Stadnik, "You have to know the two people can do business together — before they meet each other." Thus, she explains, an easy-going client usually requires an easy-going cleaner, whereas a drill-sergeant-type may demand a foot soldier.

And what of the finer points? Does little Johnny sneeze at the smell of lemon-scented cleaner? Must Petunia the kitty stay indoors despite her obvious wishes to do otherwise? The answers are all on file.

Like her clients, Stadnik keeps a

bag of baby wipes (she uses baby wipes to clean her own house, using only non-toxic cleaners). No longer the footloose entrepreneur of 15 years ago, she now has the responsibility of raising a 4-year-old son. That has sparked an interest in education, and she serves as a board member of the Waldorf School in San Rafael.

Stadnik rarely gets to meet clients face-to-face, a source of minor frustration. To partially remedy this matter of visual anonymity, she included her picture, along with Irene's, in the company's Yellow Pages ad this year. "After I did that, I thought, 'Hey, wouldn't it be nice to ask all our regular clients to send a photo for the bulletin board. But then I thought, 'Hmm, that might seem a little too strange.'"

Indeed. Sounds more like a job for a gumshoe.

☆ *Steve Symanovich*