The Duties of a Domestic Engineer

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Millenia Trump

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When you think of a “housewife,” what comes to mind? The 1950s model of Donna Reed and a time when women stayed home to create a “perfect” environment for their hardworking husbands? Or maybe you think of the more modern Real Housewives from television, who spend less time cooking and cleaning and more time arguing with each other at expensive restaurants and resorts?

Or maybe it’s neither. After all, the number of stay-at-home parents in the United States is increasing steadily – up from 23 percent in 2009 to 29 percent in 2017 – as more women (and men) opt out of the workforce to stay at home and manage the household instead. Many are also eschewing the traditional “housewife” or "homemaker" monikers in favor of the more all-encompassing term "domestic engineer." Although the primary duties of this job haven’t changed much over time – and still focus on cooking, cleaning and caring for children – the modern domestic engineer fills a number of roles in the American home.

What Is a Domestic Engineer?

Every year, in honor of Mother’s Day, Salary.com calculates the “worth” of a stay-at-home mom – or domestic engineer. In 2018, the estimated median annual salary was determined to be $162,581, about $5,000 more than in 2017, and about $25,000 more than in 2009. While, obviously, there aren’t any actual paychecks for this role, which is a 24-7 position, there are a lot of responsibilities that were taken into consideration and incorporated into the calculation when determining what the pay rate should be.

To come up with its calculation, Salary.com used the salaries for those who perform some of the most common jobs that domestic engineers do, and determined how many hours per week one might perform that role (i.e., 11 hours as an executive chef; six hours as a CEO). The list of roles includes such expected roles as housekeeper, teacher, cook, janitor, driver, event planner, accountant, plumber and groundskeeper, as well as a few unexpected jobs like psychologist, social media manager, photographer, tailor and athletic trainer. Although some question the validity of the salary figures for a domestic engineer, noting that it would be less expensive to hire professionals to handle many of these tasks, the fact remains that a domestic engineer has a wide range of job duties that require varying degrees of effort and skill.

Childcare

One of the primary duties of a domestic engineer is to care for children, ranging from infants to teenagers, ensuring that all of their physical and emotional needs are met. This not only includes handling basic tasks like providing meals, changing diapers and bathing, it also includes making sure the children are supervised and educated. Depending on the age of the child, this might also encompass helping with schoolwork (or even volunteering in classrooms to assist teachers), providing enrichment activities, and assigning chores and responsibilities. Childcare responsibilities also include establishing boundaries and expectations, and enforcing rules –as well as administering consequences for breaking those rules.

In some cases, a domestic engineer is also responsible for caring for other family members, such as an elderly or ill parent or relative. This includes many of the same tasks, including feeding, helping with bathing and dressing, and providing transportation and coordination for doctors' appointments and socialization.

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Cooking

A domestic engineer is the primary meal provider for his or her family, and as such, manages meal planning, shopping, cooking and serving the food. This requires working within the parameters of the family’s budgets and preferences, as well as his or her own abilities in the kitchen. Some domestic engineers enjoy preparing meals and spend a great deal of time doing the cooking and experimenting with new recipes and flavors. Others are less enthusiastic about this task, and may rely heavily on a rotation of basic recipes or convenience foods. In some cases, domestic engineers are faced with significant restrictions that they have to work around, such as a food allergy or intolerance, or a desire to follow a specific diet, and thus spend that much more time and energy developing meal plans and preparing food.

Cleaning

Cleaning is another key aspect of a domestic engineer’s job description, and another one that’s met with a wide range of enthusiasm and skill. Some people are committed to maintaining a spotless home, and spend hours every day scrubbing, sweeping and vacuuming, ensuring that everything is in its place. Others take a more laid back approach, saving the deep cleaning for visitors only. Regardless, there are certain tasks that most domestic engineers undertake on a daily or weekly basis, including washing dishes, doing laundry and trash removal. Some opt to delegate these and other tasks to other members of the household, or even subcontract them to a cleaning service.

Transportation

Domestic engineers are the primary source of transportation for members of the family who can’t get around themselves. Even those who live in urban areas and don’t drive their own cars typically escort young children to school or other activities. Many stay-at-home parents like to joke that they actually spend more time in the car than at home, as they transport the kids to school, sports, lessons and other activities, and then manage their own to-do lists and take care of family errands. Domestic engineers might also be responsible for managing the maintenance of family vehicles, scheduling service appointments, taking care of registration and inspection requirements, and researching insurance coverage options.

Financial Management

Although a domestic engineer may not earn an actual paycheck, he or she is typically very involved in the financial management of the home. From creating annual and monthly budgets to tracking spending and paying bills, a domestic engineer typically has a finger on the pulse of the family’s finances and makes decisions about spending. Often, domestic engineers spend a great deal of time trying to find ways to save money and find the best deals, which could include everything from clipping coupons to doing online price research. A domestic engineer is also involved in the long-term management of household finances, making decisions about insurance coverage and retirement and estate planning.

Household Maintenance and Management

Domestic engineers fill many roles when it comes to the physical management of the home, from interior design to landscaping and home maintenance. Most are heavily involved in, or even solely responsible for, designing and decorating the interior of the home, including preparing for holidays. Depending on his or her level of skill and the availability of tools, actual maintenance work (such as making repairs or home improvement) might be one of these duties, or he or she may call a professional to complete the work. In any case, a domestic engineer is responsible for staying on top of home maintenance, making sure all necessary tasks are completed and dealing with emergencies that might come up – such as plumbing leaks or damage from the weather.

Event Planning

Birthdays, holidays, family vacations – domestic engineers are often the social and entertainment coordinators of the household, handling all aspects of event planning. Specifically, this might include setting dates for events, securing reservations, preparing or organizing food, sending invitations, decorating and buying gifts. If the family is traveling, a domestic engineer is usually the one to research destinations, book hotels and transportation, create itineraries, purchase tickets for activities and take care of packing. A domestic engineer typically handles all of the family’s social obligations, including responding to invitations and ensuring that the family is appropriately attired and that they bring gifts and/or food, as necessary.

Healthcare

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that women make about 80 percent of the healthcare decisions in the home, making “chief medical officer” one of the key duties of a domestic engineer. Under the healthcare umbrella, a domestic engineer is involved in preventive care – including nutrition, modeling healthy behaviors, managing doctors' appointments – and in providing primary care for sick family members. Most of these individuals provide at least some form of basic healthcare, from simple first aid to easing the symptoms of colds, allergies and viruses. Domestic engineers are usually the ones to schedule doctor visits for ill family members, and manage prescriptions as necessary.

Volunteering

Because domestic engineers don’t work in traditional employment, it’s often assumed or expected that they will take on volunteer duties with their children’s schools, sports teams, community organizations and/or church. Many domestic engineers serve as classroom parents, coaches, troop leaders or in other roles in addition to their responsibilities at home. Often, this is due to their flexible schedules and their desire to not only be a part of their children’s lives, but also as a social outlet and the opportunity to interact with other adults, which may be in short supply otherwise.

Gender in the Role of a Homemaker

The vast majority of domestic engineers are women. In fact, even women who do work outside the home spend twice as much time on housework than men, and are generally considered the primary caregivers of children and other family members, including elderly relatives, regardless of their employment status. That being said, a growing number of men are opting to become stay-at-home parents/domestic engineers. According to Pew Research, the number of stay-at-home dads has more than doubled since 1989. The number of male domestic engineers in the U.S. hit its peak in 2010, during the Great Recession, but a significant number of men noted that the reason they were at home was because they couldn’t find a job, not that they wanted to take care of the family.

The story is different for women. Pew Research indicates that the majority of stay-at-home mothers do so by choice, although women who have earned college degrees are more likely to return to work after having children. Still, only about 6 percent of stay-at-home mothers say that they are doing so because they cannot find a job.

Perceptions of Domestic Engineers

The notion of becoming a domestic engineer has been undergoing a significant shift in recent years. Research indicates that in the last few decades, the majority of domestic engineers have either been men and woman of lower socioeconomic status, for whom the cost of going to work (childcare, transportation and work clothing) would exceed any potential earnings, especially without a college degree, or those families that could afford to live on a single income. As the cost of living has increased, and perceptions of gender roles and the desire of women to work have changed, the number of people choosing to stay home and be domestic engineers has declined overall. That being said, millennials are starting to embrace the idea of domestic engineering more than previous generations, and are increasingly rejecting the idea of “doing it all” as a working parent. They acknowledge that the duties of a domestic engineer are all-encompassing, and require much of the same decision-making, problem-solving, multitasking and management skills that are necessary in the workplace.

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What Are the Duties of a Homemaker?

MacKenzie Herald

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In 2003, there were 5.4 millions homemakers in America, according to a report by the United States Census Bureau. The job of homemaker or stay-at-home parent comes with no salary, benefits or vacation time. However, it is one the most valuable jobs in many families. Many women (and some men) leave their former occupations to become homemakers. Homemakers are women and men who organize and perform duties of family households. These tasks include child care, cooking and cleaning.

Child care

During the day, child care is left to homemakers although many working parents help out when arriving home. Homemakers usually stay home with younger children, handling the feeding and diapering. As the children are growing, homemakers are responsible for creating a happy, healthy environment that will foster positive emotional and physical development. Additionally, they help to discipline children and teach them good habits before they start preschool. If the children are older, homemakers pick them up from school or wait at home for their arrival. They also assist with any homework, fix after-school snacks and drive them to events. Some homemakers choose to home-school their children.

Home management

Homemakers act as household managers and bookkeepers. They set up and drive children to doctor and dental appointments. Homemakers make any daily purchases that are needed, such as groceries and school supplies. They keep a schedule of all the activities of those in the home and make sure everyone stays on task. Stay-at-home parents pay bills and set household budgets. With their partner, they make important decisions about expenses. Additionally, homemakers take care of maintenance around the home, whether they decide to fix it or hire a professional. They usually handle car maintenance and repair needs as well.

Cooking and cleaning

Meals and cleaning usually fall upon homemakers. Though some delegate chores to others when needed, many still perform the major duties themselves. Homemakers organize items in the home, do laundry and take care of the yard. Cleaning duties vary but generally include dishes, floor cleaning, sanitization and windows. Homemakers also take care of meal arrangements. They shop for groceries, cook daily meals and sometimes prepare meals in advance. Some prepare school lunches for the children or work lunches for their spouse. Stay-at-home parents also prepare bottles for infants and make sure that everyone in the home has nutritious meals.

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Housewife Job Description

Siva Stephens

*Updated December 30, 2018*

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Whether she calls herself a homemaker, a stay-at-home-mom or a Domestic Goddess, being a housewife is a full-time job. In fact, since she is at work 24 hours a day, it is the equivalent of three full-time jobs. Even without adding childcare to the mix, today’s successful housewife is a highly-skilled professional with a mind-boggling job description. Her daily responsibilities range from chemistry to carpentry--and her paycheck is her family’s well-being.

Housekeeper

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Caring for her home is one of the most visible of a housewife’s responsibilities. She needn’t do all the work herself--she may have paid help, if she can afford it, and she may assign certain chores to her children, if any--but it is her job to see that her family’s surroundings and possessions are clean, hygienic and in working condition. This includes, but is not limited to, cleaning floors and carpets, washing dishes, dusting and polishing furniture, scouring bathrooms, and clothing care. And yes: a housewife does windows.

Jill-of-All-Trades

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A good housewife has mastered basic handyman skills. She can perform minor repairs on the household appliances, do essential carpentry such as installing curtain rods and hanging pictures, and carry out the routine maintenance of her home’s plumbing, heating and air-conditioning systems. She is also responsible for maintaining a file of service people who will fix problems that are beyond her capabilities and for overseeing their work.

Chef

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A housewife is responsible for her family’s meals. She must plan a menu of nutritious meals that will fit within her budget, shop for the groceries, prepare and serve the food, clean up afterward and keep the kitchen sanitary. She is expected to plan her meals around dietary restrictions, remember her family members’ food preferences and allergies, and make special meals for holidays, parties and other festive occasions.

Decorator

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In addition to keeping her home clean, a housewife keeps it attractive. She is most often the one who chooses the furniture, colors, textiles and ornaments that will adorn the family home, and if she has creative talent she may paint, wallpaper and sew things like curtains and throw pillows herself. She may update her home’s décor several times a year, and she is responsible for gathering, displaying, dismantling and storing seasonal decorations.

Bookkeeper

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Quite often a housewife oversees all the family finances in addition to the housekeeping money. She may budget the money brought in by the wage-earning partner, pay all the bills and set small sums aside to make larger purchases or build a savings account.

Diplomat

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A housewife is often the public face of her family during the business day. She is expected to deal with phone calls and deliveries, to visit trades people and to run errands for her family. If she has children, it is the housewife who interacts most often with teachers and health professionals on their behalf. It’s up to the housewife to keep relations cordial with the neighbors and to keep track of her family’s social obligations.