

Now naturally, like many of us, I have a reluctance to change too much of the old ways. But there is no virtue at all in clinging as some do to tradition merely for its own sake. In this age of electricity and modern heating systems, there is no need at all to employ the sorts of numbers necessary even a generation ago. Indeed, it has actually been an idea of mine for some time that the retaining of unnecessary numbers simply for tradition's sake - resulting in employees having an unhealthy amount of time on their hands - has been an important factor in the sharp decline in professional standards. Furthermore, Mr Farraday had made it clear that he planned to hold only very rarely the sort of large social occasions Darlington Hall had seen frequently in the past. I did then go about the task Mr Farraday had set me with some dedication; I spent many hours working on the staff plan, and at least as many hours again thinking about it as I went about other duties or as I lay awake after retiring. Whenever I believed I had come up with something, I probed it for every sort of oversight, tested it through from all angles. Finally, I came up with a plan which, while perhaps not exactly as Mr Farraday had requested, was the best, I felt sure, that was humanly possible. Almost all the attractive parts of the house could remain operative: the extensive servants' quarters - including the back corridor, the two still rooms and the old laundry - and the guest corridor up on the second floor would be dust-sheeted, leaving all the main ground-floor rooms and a generous number of guest rooms. Admittedly, our present team of four would manage this programme only with reinforcement from some daily workers; my staff plan therefore took in the services of a gardener, to visit once a week, twice in the summer, and two cleaners, each to visit twice a week. The staff plan would, furthermore, for each of the four resident employees mean a radical altering of our respective customary duties. The two young girls, I predicted, would not find such changes so difficult to accommodate, but I did all I could to see that Mrs Clements suffered the least adjustments, to the extent that I undertook for myself a number of duties which you may consider most broad-minded of a butler to do.

Even now, I would not go so far as to say it is a bad staff plan; after all, it enables a staff of four to cover an unexpected amount of ground. But you will no doubt agree that the very best staff plans are those which give clear margins of error to allow for those days when an employee is ill or for one reason or another below par. In this particular case, of course, I had been set a slightly extraordinary task, but I had nevertheless not been neglectful to incorporate 'margins' wherever possible. I was especially conscious that any resistance there may be on the part of Mrs Clements, or the two girls, to the taking on of duties beyond their traditional boundaries would be compounded by any notion that their workloads had greatly increased. I had then, over those days of struggling with the staff plan, expended a significant amount of thought to ensuring that Mrs Clements and the girls, once they had got over their aversion to adopting these more 'eclectic' roles, would find the division of duties stimulating and unburdensome.

Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (1989)