

Personal Driver

Professional chauffeurs make a lot of money these days by driving their clients from place to place, but there are a lot of people who would like to have or need a full time driver and can't afford the cost of a professional chauffeur. They have their own vehicle and probably wouldn't mind you using yours if you would just take them where they (or their unsupervised children) need to go. One man in New Hampshire makes a fair living doing this very thing and filling in where professional chauffeurs sometimes can't.

Description of Business: Believe it or not, some people who live in big cities don't always like to drive themselves where they want or need to go and they'll pay you to do it for them. They either just don't like driving and can afford to pay you or can't find a friend to go and pick up their kids from soccer when something unexpected happens. Does this sound like chauffeuring? Well, it should in a way, but the difference here is you use either your own vehicle (doesn't exactly have to be a high class model) or your client's vehicle for the job.

Income Potential: Some people charge \$10 an hour for this service, others charge up to \$30 and do numerous runs for people every day. And since you can do several of these jobs each day, if you get enough clients it shouldn't be too hard to make a full time living out of this. No matter how long you're in the car, even if it's for 15 minutes, you can bill them a \$10 service charge.

Skills & Equipment: You'll need a vehicle that runs reliably for this job. The better your vehicle looks inside and outside, the better odds are that you'll pick up some customers, though.

Have a cell phone that you can use to contact both your clients and any emergency services you might need while on your trip. This can also be very helpful if you're transporting children without their parents if something is wrong with the child or something happens while they're in your care.

Get a journal or a PDA to keep your appointments in and make sure you'll be able to make it on time. Give yourself some extra time between jobs to make sure you get from one drop off point to the next pick-up point.

It's a good idea to know some first aid and have a little medical training, such as CPR and knowing what it means when someone has high or low blood sugar, especially in children. Don't be ignorant of these things. If you know a child has low blood sugar and you spy them eating candy in the back seat of your car, call the parent immediately and ask permission to take it away. If they've given you prior permission to do this, don't make the call; just pull over and take it away from them, even if they get angry.

Getting Started: Your personal appearance and your performance are going to be just as important as those same aspects of your vehicle. Some people won't care too much as long as you look clean, but higher class clients might expect a more professional attitude akin to that of a real chauffeur. This doesn't mean you have to wear dress clothing all the time or ties and etcetera, but it does mean you need to look the part you're supposed to be playing. Dress neatly and in front of any customer, avoid smoking, chewing gum, and eating candy. Stop and get something to eat between jobs, but don't eat and try to drive at the same time. You can drink a soda or a bottle of water while driving, but have a cup holder to put it in and try to drink from it as little as possible. It's preferred that you try not to eat or drink much at all during these trips, but if it's a longer journey, be lenient on yourself about drinking a soda or water, but don't eat while driving. They expect you to pay attention to the road, not your bacon double cheeseburger.

Startup Cost: Make any repairs necessary on your vehicle first and foremost to make sure it's in the best condition you can get it in before you start in on this.

After you get your repairs done, take your car to a local car wash or, better, do it yourself. Doing it yourself could be the best option because it's obviously free, except for soap and other cleaning items you should already have in your possession.

Marketing & Promotion: Put up flyers where permitted, especially around hotels and airports where people are going to be coming and going a lot. People in hotels are usually from out of town, though, and don't have their own vehicle there with them for you to drive and the more expensive the hotel you advertise at, the higher quality service you're likely to be expected to provide. Try to start small.

Problems to Watch Out For: Some good advice to save on fuel consumption is to leave the air conditioner or the heater off in order to save a little money at the gas station. According to some sources, you could save 10% by leaving these items off and running as few onboard electrical devices as possible while driving. If the client requests the air conditioner or heater on, though, it's a good idea to turn it on.

Make sure to keep your tires inflated to a proper amount on a regular basis. The harder your engine has to work to push your car down the road, the

more stress is put on it and the more fuel you consume.

Have your vehicle serviced regularly and if you notice a problem with your client's vehicle as you're driving it, tell them immediately. Don't let yourself fall into the habit of thinking "it's not my problem", because it concerns your work and it is your problem. Let them know about any problems with their vehicle as quickly as you can.

Mind your own business. If a client hires you to drive them somewhere and you notice an argument or something going on between a man and his wife or between parents and their children, don't give your opinion or advice unless it's asked for. Even if children or teenagers ask you for your advice, don't give it, especially if their parents aren't around and if they badger you about it, tell them simply to listen to their parents, even if you think the parent is wrong. It's not your concern unless you suspect something illegal is going on in the home and have reasonable concern for the child. When getting involved in your client's personal affairs, be careful.

Another note concerning the transporting of children is where to drop them off. Do not under any circumstances EVER drop a minor off at a destination other than where you were told to take them. If the child or teenager gets out of the car while you're stopped at a traffic light, get out your cell phone and call the parent immediately with your location and where their child was headed. Do this immediately and don't entertain the thought of covering for the kid, even if you could be somewhat sympathetic to them and their wants. Also, don't stop anywhere other than your destination unless it's absolutely necessary. If they want something to eat, call and ask the parent first, but make sure if you buy the food with your money that you'll get it back the next time they call you. If it's an older teenager and they have their own money, it's still a good idea to call the parents. It's your job to drive them only where the parent wants them to go, unless you've made prior arrangements with them that you can take the older teen anywhere he/she wants to go within reason. Try to work something like this out ahead of time if you're going to be driving an adolescent around.

Competition: Professional chauffeurs can be competition, but consider the fact that most of them drive limousines or the high class vehicles of their customers and they'll charge a lot more than you're going to for close to the same level of service. Some people would like to have a professional chauffeur drive them everywhere they need to go, but can't afford such a service on a regular basis and this is where you come in.

As far as other personal drivers, you could help your business by buying a different vehicle, depending on what kind you have. It's not necessary to start out with a high class vehicle, but if you're a little worried that your old car, reliable though it may be, might not be casting the best image for you, you might want to get something more presentable. This is not a requirement, though, as long as you're reliable and consistent in your work. If you get enough work to be able to pay for the newer vehicle every month, consider it and it might help your business. Unless you just absolutely have to get a cherry red convertible (some clients might like this), try to get something a little more neutral in color to keep with your professional look.

Additional Twists: You could also offer your services as a designated driver to some of the local bars and taverns. Be careful letting someone in your vehicle if they're inebriated, though, and you'll probably have to use your own vehicle for this one, because once you get them where they want to go, you might not be able to get back unless public transportation is running after you drop them off.

About the Author

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