

The 12 Most Vital Steps of a Successful Office Move

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Introduction

The office is moving and it's your responsibility to choose the right mover. "Simple," you say. "I'll just get the phone book and let my fingers do the walking." Wrong. Unfortunately, you can't judge a mover's quality of service by the size or content of their ad in the yellow pages.

Did you know the forte of most moving companies is their long distance household division while their weakest area is commercial moving?

An experienced office mover knows that the difference between a residential and a commercial move is as great as the difference between night and day. Yes, many will get you to your new location, but will it be on time, within the budget, and without mishap? Unfortunately, probably not.

Your goal is to accomplish this move as a hero, not end up the scapegoat. So instead of playing "Russian roulette" with the phone book (and maybe your career), ask the building managers at both your present and new locations to recommend two or three moving companies. Property management people have extensive first-hand experience with movers and are as anxious as you to have the move be a success. Therefore, they are a great place to start your selection process.

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Another avenue is to visit your new office building and ask some of the tenants if they would recommend their last mover. Perhaps your attorney, accountant, insurance agent, or other supplier may be in a position to suggest an office mover. Since they don't want to jeopardize their relationship with you, they will be careful whom they recommend.

After you have selected and pre-qualified potential bidders, take the time to meet individually with each mover's representative for an analysis of the move. Be certain you fully understand what will be done and how the move will be carried out. Get at least three estimates. However, if it's a large move, you may want to solicit five bids.

Have someone of authority (not just an information gatherer) from your company meet with each mover during the inventory process. Inform the mover about your needs and ask how he proposes to meet them. The same representative from your company should meet with all of the movers. During the initial walk-through or inventory process, determine whether you or the mover will be responsible for handling the movement of fragile items such as lamps, paintings, and plants. Identify any additional services such as the packing of common areas like the supply room or library, the balancing and bolting of lateral file cabinets, and the disassembly of modular furniture.

After the salesman completes his inventory process, set a time for him to return and make his formal presentation. At that time he should bring a list of the last five companies whose offices his company moved with contact names and phone numbers. Tell him not to furnish you with a list of references (which he naturally would pick and choose to create a favorable impression). If your move is very large, request that he provide you with a list of comparable size moves he has done in the last 12 months. Ask him to also present at that time his Certificate of Insurance, as well as actual pictures of the type of moving equipment he will be using on your move. Some movers have been known to simply copy pictures and drawings of equipment they find in other moving company brochures and represent it as their own.

The next step will be to interview your mover. Allow enough time for your mover to make his formal presentation and to answer the following questions:

1. What type of moving cartons will you provide?

The best moving carton is between 1.5 and 2.0 cubic feet in volume. Anything larger could weigh more than 70 pounds when it is packed and be too heavy for your employees to move around safely during the packing stage. *Beware--according to the National Safety Council, 75% of all workers comp claims nationwide are from back injuries caused by lifting.*

2. How will you handle our computers and other electronic equipment?

The preferred manner is to first wrap each computer component with bubble wrap and then place the protected equipment onto a steel or wooden cart for safe transport. A new technique, using a device called a Comp-U-Wrap™, has all of the advantages of bubble wrap but none of the disadvantages. It's faster, easier to use and more efficient than bubble wrap. Since it's reusable, it doesn't fill landfills. Another method that is very popular is to transport them in a large open box usually made out of cardboard. This is not as safe because they can crush when the load shifts on the moving van. Also, since the boxes are open on top, their contents are susceptible to water damage if it rains. Regardless of which method your mover chooses, do not allow him to "blanket-wrap" your computers with furniture pads. According to an article written in PC World magazine in September, 1996, Chuck Miller

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warns about harmful dust particles entering your drive and causing it to crash. Movers' furniture pads are full of dust, dirt and fibers and, therefore, should not be wrapped around the CPU.

3. How will you handle our lateral file cabinets?

Moving companies that have a Spider Crane® can relocate file cabinets safely without disturbing the contents. This "boxless move" concept eliminates the risk of mixed-up or lost files and gives you 100% access to your files immediately before and following the move.

4. How will you handle our desks?

Here, too, is a clever invention for minimizing your downtime during an office relocation. Instead of shutting down hours before your move packing the contents of your furniture, movers can inflate a Space Gobbler™ into your drawers which immobilizes the contents so that nothing moves around and falls out. If your mover does not own Space Gobblers™, you must totally empty and pack the contents of all the drawers.

5. How will you handle our library?

Have the mover *under your close supervision* load your books onto book bins which look like book cases on wheels. This procedure, like the Spider Crane® and Space Gobbler™, greatly reduces your downtime because it gives you 100% access to your books immediately before and after the move. The Dark Ages method for moving a library is to pack the books into mountains of boxes where they can easily get mixed up. This system is very labor intensive and puts you out of business before and after the move.

6. How will you protect the office building from damage?

To protect carpet, a new product called *Pathrite* or *Carpet Cover*, covers carpet with a 6-mil-thick vinyl that has a light adhesive on one side. It has all of the benefits of Masonite yet none of the problems. It is easy to handle, store and apply. Where Masonite is very labor intensive and expensive to install, the vinyl carpet cover rolls down in minutes. Another new product, called the Mat-A-Door®, protects lobby walls, main entrance doors and the lobby side frame of a passenger elevator that is used to haul furniture.

7. How will you load the furniture onto the moving van?

You can immediately measure the level of sophistication of your mover if he uses the "floating" method for loading the furniture instead of the stacking method. The floating method keeps the furniture on the dolly on the floor of the moving van. It is fast, safe, and efficient. The old-fashioned way is the stacking method where the mover undollies the furniture onto the truck and stacks it floor to ceiling. This procedure (used on most long distance household moves) can cause considerable crushing damage to anything at the bottom of the pile. It is also slow and very labor intensive.

8. What provisions do you have for contingencies such as a truck breakdown, an elevator failure, or the need for additional men or equipment?

The best answer is that someone of authority from the moving company will be accessible during your move. Such a person should be an owner or the general manager. Usually, the salesman has no decision-making authority in an emergency or last-minute change of strategy.

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9. What type of insurance coverage do you have?

John Shubert, president and CEO of Southern States Insurance, Inc., cautions "The one with the insurance often becomes the one who pays." You may be contingently liable for accidents if your mover isn't adequately covered. *"For your protection, you should demand current certificates of insurance listing workers' compensation as well as general liability coverage -- \$2 million for general aggregate and a \$5 million umbrella,"* advises Shubert.

If you obtain replacement value insurance, don't think that it is a substitute for a good mover. This type of coverage normally does not cover valuable papers (your files) or recorded electronic data; and if you're put out of business while you're waiting for the insurance company to settle your claims, replacement coverage does not pay for your downtime and lost business. (Insurance companies have between 60 and 90 days to settle claims.)

10. Will we be permitted to audit your invoices?

A small minority of movers have a habit of billing for movers who are never on the move, i.e. "ghost movers." Will his company permit you to examine the payroll and cost records to verify all moving charges if you deem it necessary?

11. Will you furnish a list of your last five office moves?

Ask for a list of the last five office moves with contacts and telephone numbers. Call all five contacts and ask the following questions:

- A. When did the mover move you? If the moves occurred more than 6 weeks ago, be suspicious.
- B. Ask how well the mover protected their furniture, p.c.'s, and contents.
- C. Ask if and how the mover protected their offices against damage.
- D. Ask if the mover completed the job in the time allotted, and if the bill exceeded the prices quoted.

12. Last but not least, "mass walk-throughs" do not save time.

This "herd" concept has become very popular in recent years but often undermines the entire selection process. First, movers on a mass walk-through will be afraid to raise vital questions for fear of informing their competitors how they propose to do the move. The mass walk-through also encourages unrealistically low bids by intimidating those who participate into second guessing their competitors' bids. Finally, the mass walk-through penalizes those movers who are thorough and detailed, and, subsequently, slower in taking their inventory. In order to keep pace with the pack, they are forced to take shortcuts or overlook important details.

If you follow the procedures outlined above, you will have taken a giant step toward being a hero--congratulated for a job well done--and not the scapegoat for all the things that went wrong.