

Moving Offices

by Cindy Lindsley and Michele Bendekovic

Does your blood pressure skyrocket the moment you hear the word “move”? Whether you are asked to move down the hall, to another floor, or to a new office building across town, it is difficult to deal with change. Fear, anxiety, and stress are all factors that accompany any office relocation. The following best practices for making a smooth transition are spelled out in the acronym “MOVING OFFICES” below.

Managing expectations: One of the most important steps is managing expectations. Updated information regarding timeline, specific individual office location, changes to support staff sharing arrangements, new equipment, public transportation, parking, etc., will require constant communication. No one wants to feel out of the loop or unimportant because of lack of details. Also note that dates are usually fluid due to construction delays. Avoid moving in the middle of the summer recruiting program or during fall fly-backs!

Opportunity to organize: The opportunity to organize in anticipation of the move is a bonus. Emphasize that now is the time for all employees to go through their respective offices (and related file space) or work stations to determine what can be discarded, sent to storage, turned into an electronic file, or better organized for continued use. Starting off fresh in well-organized space will create a positive environment.

Vendor issues: Vendors will need to be reconsidered and notified as to whether they will remain providers — especially if your office is moving more than just a few blocks away. This is an occasion when contracts should be reviewed and a de-

termination made as to whether a more economical or efficient solution is available. Find out any special requirements needed for new equipment so that there will be adequate space available.

Information technology needs: Your information technology department most likely will need to assist with the planning and purchase of new technological equipment and tools for your new office space. Establish needs and wishes by department or practice group so that enough physical space, cabling, and power are available for the necessary equipment. State-of-the-art technology should be purchased for the conference center and other rooms that will be used for large meetings, CLE, and training programs.

Notifications: Clients, vendors, alumni, family, and friends will need to be notified of your office move, and this should be coordinated through a central person or group. In most firms this is handled by the marketing department, but an experienced paralegal or support staff member will need to create a comprehensive master notification for all courts, registered agents, the patent and trademark office, foreign associates, governmental agencies, and other legal entities in order to avoid potential problems related to a physical address change.

Going green: New office space offers an opportunity to become greener. Make every effort to go paperless and design your space according to LEED certification. Institute a recycling program that is easy and effective.

Office assignments: Office assignments can be very political. Agree on a fair and equitable way to select offices and be prepared to support the criteria used. One suggestion is to start with partner compensation, followed by job title, then tenure.

File space: In the political game, file space is second only to office assignments. The file cabinet assignment guidelines should be consistent for each level of lawyer, paralegal, C-class officer, and support staff title. Close proximity to the office is always best. Note that several practice groups may need a large secure file room due to the nature of their practice (i.e., intellectual property and estate planning).

Firm guidelines: Relocating to new space provides the perfect time to rein in undesirable behaviors by establishing some guidelines to be observed in the new office. For example, your firm's guidelines might specify that no plants will be allowed on the ledges of the desks in the hallway, and that shared workroom space will be monitored and reserved just like conference rooms. The dress code might also be revisited to establish a professional uniform for conference, reception, supply, mail, and office services staff. It is the ideal time to remind all employees of professional presence.

Ideas and input: Seeking ideas and input from employees at all levels during the various planning stages of the move is imperative. Buy-in is key to boosting morale and ownership of the process. Host several brainstorming sessions to create best practices for various tasks related to the pre- and post-move. Seek volunteers who are willing to serve as move coordinators for sections and departments of the firm. Reward them at the end of the relocation.

CLE and training material storage: Determine the needs of your department regarding on-site storage of DVDs, course handouts, reference books, seminar binders, conference notes, orientation program materials, etc. The firm's library space may be downsizing, so it is vital that you ensure the resources you need remain available and easy to locate.

Employee attitudes and enthusiasm: Moves are stressful at best, and employee attitudes and enthusiasm are significant factors in determining the success of the move. Incorporate contests (such as guessing how many boxes of materials will be sent to off-site storage prior to the move), schedule periodic jeans work days with complimentary lunch, and offer other incentives to keep everyone motivated to prepare for the impending move.

Security and disaster preparedness: Every building's security procedures are different, so it is necessary to update the firm's security and disaster preparedness policies and procedures accordingly. The firm's plan should include backing up work product and other data in a secure location. Confirm that your firm has developed a broad-based plan for emergencies including weather alerts and dealing with unwelcome visitors, weapons, bombs, or terrorist threats. An employee hotline should be in place during all emergencies to account for personnel who were in the building at the time of the incident. Every building should have an escape plan and hold intermittent drills for departing the building due to fire or other threatening conditions.

After the Move

Once you have moved and are in your new space, it is time to take a deep breath, debrief, and re-evaluate how you actually got there and what you could have done differently. Follow the advice in the acronym "NEW SPACE" below.

Needs assessment: Take the time to talk to employees and be sure their needs are addressed and, if appropriate, met. Change on this scale is very stressful and sometimes all an employee needs is someone to listen to his or her concerns. There should be a point person on your move team charged with this task who is also recording this information. Often an employee's concern is shared by others and having a central point person helps ensure consistent handling of concerns. Posting information on your firm's intranet will help address concerns.

Energize your employees: Encourage employees to unpack quickly and keep their new areas clean. As mentioned above, offer incentives to make this happen.

Work with all employees: Ensure that all employees are comfortable in their new space.

Security concerns: Address security concerns immediately. From new building procedures for visitors to new security codes and cards, this is a follow-up item that needs to be addressed immediately if problems or questions arise.

Prepare all employees: Provide all employees with the information needed to answer directional questions until everyone is familiar with their new location. Have new floor maps readily available that list all employees in their new locations. Provide directional signs that designate conference rooms, the library, vending machine locations, copy rooms, bathrooms, etc.

Assess every aspect of the move: To be sure all performed as expected, assess every aspect of the move, from the movers who were hired to do the physical move to security, vendors, your facilities,

technology and telecommunications teams, and those on your move team. Hold debriefing meetings to get all the input needed to evaluate the success of your move.

Congratulations: Don't forget to congratulate everyone for a move well done!

Employee attitudes: In the days and weeks following a move, employee attitudes will still be a key component determining the success of your move. Keep everyone's spirits up as the unpacking and adjustment to a new location continues.

Successful moves require a great deal of planning and coordination. The sidebar beginning below offers suggestions for items to include on your office relocation checklist.

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Developing a Checklist for Your Office Move

Moving an office requires a great deal of planning and coordination. Listing tasks to be accomplished on a spreadsheet (with columns to note start date, duration, end date, resources needed, and start status) will provide you with an up-to-the-minute checklist of what remains to be done. Here are some major areas of responsibility you might include on your checklist. Your spreadsheet should break each of these areas down into the numerous smaller tasks that must be completed.

Move coordination — Pre-move planning should include establishment of a relocation project team, determination of move requirements, review and revision of relocation and occupancy plans, issuance

of regular schedule updates, and coordination of vendor activities. Move coordination includes pre-move inspections and briefings, development of a relocation handbook, and oversight of the myriad details involved in moving cartons, furniture, and equipment. Post-move coordination should include a post-move walk-through, processing of any damages, and removal of any surplus furniture and equipment.

Construction — Construction needs vary tremendously — from working with an architect and contractor on building construction to working with a building manager on office

construction. Be sure to address such tasks as final inspections and issuance of an occupancy permit (if required).

Information systems — Cabling infrastructure, computers (including network equipment and software), and telephone/paging/voice mail equipment are all important areas to address. In each area the tasks will include determining needs, issuing RFPs as necessary, negotiating and awarding contracts, and overseeing disconnection/reinstallation of existing equipment and installation of new equipment.

Furniture — Tasks will include inventorying existing furniture and determining what will be moved to the new location, planning new furniture layouts for both common areas and individual offices, ordering new furniture as necessary, and overseeing delivery and placement of furniture.

Records and collections — Relocation planning needs to address library, supply room, and file space needs. This might include evaluating existing equipment and shelving; planning layouts of these areas; reviewing document retention policies (and purging files of documents that do not need to be saved); notifying subscription services of the move; and overseeing delivery and installation of any new equipment, shelving, or file cabinets.

Food service — Don't forget to consider coffee service, vending, and catering needs in planning the move. Tasks might include inventorying supplies; bidding services and equipment as needed; and ordering new supplies and establishing new contracts as needed.

Specialty equipment — Remember to plan for cable TV installation and any other specialty equipment needed, including AV equipment. Depending on your firm's needs this could include determining construction requirements and bidding contracts.

Security — Your office must be secure and your lawyers and staff must have adequate access beginning day one in your new location. This could mean coordinating security arrangements with building management or a much more extensive list of tasks,

from developing and bidding security system specs to ensuring that a new system is operational. Elevator access, after-hours building access, office keys, and security cards are among the issues to be addressed.

Vendor coordination — If you are moving next door to your current location, there may be little need for new vendors or vendor equipment, but areas that may need to be addressed in a major relocation include copier and fax equipment, courier services, mail equipment, and cost accounting system equipment.

Administration — Major areas to consider include artwork (inventorying existing artwork and contracting with an art consultant to plan for the new space); parking (determining requirements, assigning reserved spaces, executing parking contracts); signage (personnel, suite, and building signage); accessories (determining requirements, selecting an accessory vendor if needed, and overseeing delivery/installation); plants (determining policies and needs and ordering as necessary); printed material (notifications of your move, new letterhead and business cards, and reprints of other firm literature with the old address); office policies (developing and distributing any new policies); and insurance (arranging for expanded in-transit coverage as well as for any policy changes needed after the move).

For a sample of a 12-page relocation checklist, [click here](#).