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Three Mistakes To Avoid In Business Relocation

Northbrook, IL

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1. Incomplete Planning and Budgeting
2. Under-estimating Lead Times and Employee Time Commitments
3. Failure to Assign One Person Accountable for all Aspects of the Project

These are the three most common errors committed by companies relocating their business operations to new commercial or industrial facilities. However, they are avoidable.

Incomplete Planning and Budgeting

After the decision to move has been made, the next critical questions become: What tasks have to be done, How long will they take, When must they start, Who will do them, and How much will they cost?

And of course, How will we stay in business during the process?

These questions are best answered using a systematic approach to managing the project.

One logical approach is to begin with a complete inventory of tasks typical to most relocations and then add and delete as appropriate to the company. Websites and consultants who practice relocation project management can provide initial reference.

In planning to accomplish tasks, it is useful to think in terms of accountability and responsibility. It's important to assign a person who is accountable for seeing that a task is done, as well as a responsible individual who actually will complete the task.

By assigning accountability and responsibility for each task, we begin to form the Relocation Committee, essential to executing and controlling the relocation project. Then we can begin to answer the remaining questions: How long will it take, When must it start, Who will do it, and How much will it cost?

Under-estimating Lead Times and Employee Time Commitments

Companies invite trouble when they begin the relocation process with an incomplete appreciation of the details, the required lead times, and especially the time necessary to coordinate and manage them. The solution is to assign additional people with proper expertise right from the outset.

To manage their relocation project, many companies instinctively assign the major responsibility to the existing facilities staff.

However, staffs normally are kept lean, sufficient for normal operations and for facility maintenance, but not for major relocation projects, which occur only infrequently.

Therefore, for a major project that affects every area of the company, the facilities staff may not have the necessary personnel and expertise, especially if members of the operations staff are not involved deeply from the very beginning.

By the time the company realizes there are problems, the project may be out of control in terms of cost and schedule. Some decisions may have been made hastily in order to maintain schedule. Such ill-considered decisions can be extremely detrimental to the company in terms of overall project cost and long-term effectiveness, thereby compromising some of the benefits that justified the move.

Additionally, employee time commitments need to be managed realistically.

Relocation projects can be undermined by under-estimating the additional burden that employees experience, when relocation tasks are added to their regular responsibilities.

Experience has shown that employees faced with conflicting demands generally react first to their primary job responsibilities and secondarily to their relocation project responsibilities. This has been observed with management as well as employees, and it can be a major reason why projects fall behind.

Failure to Assign One Person Accountable for all Aspects of the Project

The process of relocating a company involves four phases: Planning, Preparing, Relocating, and Recovering in the new facility. That process can last from a few months to several years.

Preparing a good relocation plan is a necessary first step, but it is just the beginning. The remaining phases must be managed continuously, because they involve hundreds of details and tasks, whose relationships, dependencies and scheduling are shifting constantly.

Most major tasks affect more than one department, and consequently they require continuous cross-departmental coordination. Once again, experience has shown that

individual departments should not be relied upon to initiate that coordination independently.

Consequently, assigning overall project accountability to one person becomes critical to success. This requires that one individual be made accountable for insuring successful completion of all aspects of the project. This might be an executive within the firm or a temporary project manager hired from outside. It's important to heed the proven adage: "When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge."

Joe Cavolick is a professional project manager who has successfully relocated thousands of employees into more than a million square feet of commercial and industrial space for both regional and international clients.

Additional information and keys to successful commercial and industrial relocation can be found at www.CavolickConsulting.com or by calling 847-753-9898.

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