Overcoming Employee Distraction and Disengagement During Relocation
The current economic landscape has created additional distractions and anxiety for relocating employees – and extra challenges for employer-sponsored moves.

However, the right combination of relevant benefits and efficient and empathetic delivery of services can reduce the stress of the relocation for both the employee and Human Resource personnel.

Distracted workers cost businesses millions of dollars each year. The 2013 Workplace Productivity Report revealed that, under ordinary workplace conditions, 4 out of 10 workers are so distracted by competing demands on their attention that they are unable to disregard distractions and focus on their job. This resulted in an average productivity loss equivalent to almost 2.5 days per month, per employee.

![Distractions During an Ordinary Workday](chart.png)

Depending on the size and pay scale of their workforce, distracted employees can cost companies hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in lost productivity and lost production.

The results of the 2013 Workplace Productivity Report indicate that phone calls, emails, and instant and text messaging account for 65% of employee distractions during an ordinary workday.

If these routine distractions are so disruptive, imagine the effect of trying to cope with the demands of the new position while looking at real estate, applying for a mortgage, locating new schools, getting acquainted with the new neighborhood, helping a spouse look for employment, and more.

Crucial, life-impacting decisions are inextricably linked with the process of relocation. It’s easy to see how employees trying to cope with these types of critically important decisions would find it difficult to remain fully focused on the responsibilities and tasks of their new position.

And it’s easy to see how the results of such a level of distraction could substantially increase the actual cost of a relocation.

Ensuring that relocating employees are kept focused and getting them up to speed and productive in the shortest possible time, is critical to
realizing relocation program ROI. In one survey by Worldwide ERC, about half of companies surveyed said they gave employees an average of four weeks to report to their new location.

This information suggests the critical importance of greatly reducing, or eliminating, extraneous distractions from the relocation process, and allowing the transferring employee to focus, unhindered, on the job.

And it is precisely in this area that relocating employees and their families are significantly affected by an over-tasked and under-resourced relocation program.

The same implications apply to Human Resources personnel who are tasked with managing relocation in addition to their regular responsibilities.

HR functions traditionally relate primarily to supporting their organization’s business strategy through human capital-related areas such as building, developing and maintaining the workforce, rather than on functions that relate to relocation activities (such as household goods moves, home sale strategies, etc.).

In a 2008 study by SHRM, more than one-half of HR professionals identified staffing/employment/recruitment as their most critical HR function, followed by training and development, and employee benefits.

In practical terms, this means the HR manager is likely to be facing a steep learning curve, additional demands on his, or her, time, and more distractions competing for their attention.

For companies, the key to recouping their relocation investment and realizing the full cost-saving potential of their relocation policy, is to minimize the “hidden” cost of relocating employees.

What Your Relocation Policy Is Really Costing Your Company…

It’s easy to identify the obvious costs of relocation – the costs of moving household goods, temporary housing, or home sale costs are easily identified.

Less obvious – and rarely considered – are the “hidden” costs of relocation.

What is a “hidden cost” of relocation?

It’s not an unexpected expense or an undisclosed line item (although HR managers often get caught by surprise by such events).

The real costs of relocation are also buried in stressed-out personnel who struggle to focus on their core competencies, hours – even days – of lost productivity, and employees who become disengaged during the process. Some employees become so disenchanted during the process of relocation that they will leave the company shortly after relocating.

Payback agreements are increasingly being used to discourage this attrition, some lasting as long as three years. However, while a payback agreement may compel an employee to remain with a company, such an agreement does nothing to foster the continued engagement of a disenchanted employee.

It costs significantly more (in actual dollars, as well as employee and supervisor time and productivity) to hire and train a new employee than it does to retain an experienced and skilled employee. Yet companies seeking to cut costs will often trim or eliminate benefits without realizing the hidden costs of these measures.

Consider…

When your relocation package doesn’t include moving expenses, or severely limits those benefits, how many days will it take your employee to search for and locate the best prices? How much more time to pre-screen moving companies to find a reliable provider?

And what if they decide to try to cut the costs they will bear for the relocation, and move themselves? How many days will they need to sort, box, pack, and ship or drive their household items themselves? What if they’re injured while doing it?

According to the Corporate Leadership Council, a disengaged employee is 87% more likely to voluntarily leave the company.
Or, if the task of comparing service providers, researching them, booking them, and monitoring the shipment, falls to the HR manager who is not trained in relocation, how many days of productivity will this cost your company?

If your relocation offer doesn’t include spousal support for a two-career couple, or settling-in assistance, consider how this added stress will affect your employee’s morale and focus.

And, of course, there’s the big stressor in an uncertain housing market – selling the old house and finding a new one. In many cases, employees’ homes are “under water”. They owe more than the house is worth, and sometimes the cost of a similar home in the new location is more than anything they could possibly realize from the sale of their current home.

Other employees may be trapped by a depreciating real estate market. The employee may feel forced to sell at a loss (and resent their employer for “forcing” them into that position), or may need to commute between the old location and the new one, until their property is sold. This is hard on the employee and the family, and cannot be sustained for long.

Many people simply don’t want to sell and uproot themselves and their family. And they wouldn’t - if not for a career opportunity and incentives too good to pass up. Some may fear losing their job if they turn down the relocation.

All of these situations create distractions and ultimately add to the “hidden” costs of relocation. The combination of a properly-designed relocation policy and the assistance of a dedicated relocation consultant alleviates, and in many cases, eliminates, the frustrations, fears, and distractions of transferring employees. In addition, a relocation services provider with the expertise to deliver personalized attention to the relocation will eliminate the distractions for both HR and the employee.

Relocation stress relievers could include:

- Home sale and purchase assistance
- High-quality, pre-screened household goods movers and real estate agents
- Tours of the new location and temporary housing
- Spousal and family assistance to ease the transitions for job-finding, new schools, etc.
- Prompt reimbursement of relocation expenses
- Tax assistance
- A dedicated relocation consultant who can manage every aspect and provide solutions to the inevitable, unforeseen problems

This is my second move in twelve months, by far the most challenging with very tight time frames. Our Consultant was absolutely incredible to work with...for the second time! She is a professional with a demeanor second to none. She was always there, a calming voice during stressful times, wise beyond her years and truly drove the best outcome for me, my family and my company.
The Right Relocation Benefits = Meeting Retention Goals

Employee retention/attrition is typically one of the most important factors in determining the success of an employee relocation or group move.

Changing a job position, and selling and buying your primary residence are among the most stressful life events a person can face. During this difficult time, it is critical that employees feel valued and supported by their employer. Companies should consider crafting their relocation benefits with an eye to securing the long-term commitment of their workers.

The failure to create relocation policy initiatives which ensure stress-reduction and increase employee satisfaction, results in disgruntled employees ready to take off in search of a more supportive working environment.

The time to begin addressing retention issues is before the relocation takes place, with a well-constructed relocation program, and an experienced relocation services provider.

By choosing to outsource some, or all of their relocation activities to a trusted relocation services provider, the organization frees its HR personnel to focus on those core competencies which directly support its human-capital objectives and goals.

Fast return to productivity and retention are mission-critical relocation objectives. When relocation services are provided in a sensitive, caring environment, employees release their objections to moving, have fewer reservations related to the relocation, and settle in more quickly in the new location. Employees arrive unhampered by stress and unfinished business, relaxed and ready to hit the ground running.

Companies which use a trusted relocation partner are more likely to experience smoother relocations, see more satisfied, more engaged, stress-free employees and realize the best value for their investment in their relocation program. No matter the size of your company, employee mobility strategies are best served by aligning resources with an experienced and trusted relocation partner.

The Benefits of a Successful Relocation

The secret to eliminating the hidden costs of employee distraction and disengagement in relocation is to be aware of what’s most important to the employee, while maintaining the company’s best interests.

A relocation services company has many resources that can help you make smart, informed, and cost-effective decisions.

Benchmarking against industry best practices and standards, needs assessment tools, vendor selection and management, budgeting software, and policy design are just a few ways they can help you and your company create a successful relocation program.

A successful relocation is one in which the employee remains focused and stress-free, and can pick up their new job responsibilities quickly and efficiently. Incorporating meaningful relocation benefits with responsive, personalized assistance and expert resources ensure transferring employees will feel good about their decision, happy about their move, and valued as an employee.

This allows the company to maximize their relocation spend, ensure faster, smoother onboarding and a quicker return to productivity for both your employees and HR personnel.
Want to know more?

NRI Relocation has transformed the approach to providing relocation services by offering flexible, efficient, cost-effective solutions for companies, delivered with a uniquely personal touch. Contact us today to get answers to your relocation questions.