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TOP TIPS FOR THAT SPRING MOVE TO YOUR NEW HOME

BY KITTY WERNER

THE SAVVY WOMEN'S GUIDE TO OWNING A HOME

Birds are not the only warm-blooded creatures to move in the spring. Every year, thousands of people sell their homes then pack up their music, books, glassware, and towels to settle down in a different location. Not only does a new homeowner have to find just the right spot in the new living room for that precious family heirloom, they have to get it there in one piece.

If you're facing imminent relocation this spring (or any other season, for that matter) here are the top five tips to keep in mind as you plan, organize, and implement your move.

1. TO MOVE YOURSELF OR NOT TO MOVE YOURSELF, THAT IS THE QUESTION

There are two principle criteria to consider in this decision: your budget and the distance you're moving. All other considerations become moot if you don't have the budget to support professional help for your move. This process can, and often does, average \$1,500 to \$8,000 depending on the distance you move and the number of rooms of furniture you're moving. If you're relocating regionally, it makes more sense financially to organize and implement the move yourself, renting a truck from a local agency, hiring local muscle, and/or asking your friends for assistance.

Distance is a critical factor in this decision, however. Packing and moving yourself within a 50 to 100 mile radius of your current home probably means you can round up some helping hands — paid in dollars or pizza — to help you unload the truck when you arrive. However, longer distances will require the help of professionals. There are national companies that provide just the help you need from packing to driving to unloading. A good place to start is on the Web at www.imove.com.

2. RUTHLESS ORGANIZATION, PART ONE

There are really only two categories of stuff in your house — replaceable and irreplaceable — and now's the time to calculate the difference between the two. In most cases, it's easy. Photographs, music collections, beloved antiques, these are irreplaceable items that will be moved no matter what the cost.

But what about your washing machine? Your couch? Your television? If you're heading off cross-country, selling an appliance here and rebuying it there may make a great deal of sense. If you're moving cross-town, by all means keep them.

Before you pack, cast a cold eye on the items clogging your basement and attic. The physical act of moving is tiring so keep that in mind as you decide what to keep and what to donate or sell at a yard sale. Is that old camping gear or sports equipment really worth the effort it will take to pack, lug, and unpack it? If you don't use it, get rid of it.

3. GET ESTIMATES, GET INSURANCE AND GET IT IN WRITING

If you're going to use a professional service to move your belongings, the best place to start looking is the American Moving and Storage Association (AMSA) at 703/683-7410



or on the Web at: www.moving.org. This is the moving industry's trade organization (with over 3,000 members) and they have a code of conduct that requires "complete disclosure of moving information to customers." Ask for a copy of their brochure outlining your rights as a consumer.

The range of prices among professional movers is wide so get lots of estimates and get them in writing. Ask if the estimate is binding or non-binding. You may be charged for a binding estimate but never for the non-binding variety. If the estimate is non-binding, get a "not to exceed" price in your contract. This means the moving company's charges cannot exceed the cost of their estimate. Find out how the mover prefers to be paid. Movers usually offer three types of insurance — basic liability (generally a "per pound" rate), depreciated value (what your belongings are currently worth) or full replacement coverage (covering the entire cost of a new item to replace a damaged one). Also check with your homeowners insurance company to see what they will cover during your relocation.

And get everything in writing — including a bill of lading before the movers take off with your stuff.

4. RUTHLESS ORGANIZATION, PART TWO

Take a minute to visualize moving day, not the lugging boxes part but after that, when the truck is unloaded and you're ready to crash on the first available horizontal surface. What do you want to have at hand — your toothbrush, towels, bed sheets, pajamas for the kids, a favorite toy? Don't pack these necessities in the moving van, keep them in your car.

As you pack boxes, mark each one with its destination in your new home and at least a hint of what's inside.

Now think about the rest of your belongings. Whatever you need to have first should be loaded into the moving truck last. That way, pots and pans will be handy for breakfast. Consider your furniture and decide what room it will be moved into. Make signs, one for each of the rooms in your new home, with a list of what furniture belongs in each. Make three copies of this material — one for reference and inventory, one set to be attached to the entrance of each room in your new home, and the third to accompany a map of the new house for your movers' reference. On moving day, attach a label to each piece of furniture indicating its destination.

Pack stuff that's stored in your attic or basement into the moving truck first. You won't need it right away so it can go right into storage.

5. DO UNTO OTHERS

Offer sodas, coffee, pizza, sandwiches, and munchies to anyone who helps, whether professional, paid or volunteer. When you care about those working with you, they will take even better care of your worldly possessions.

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The Savvy Woman's Guide to Owning a Home

How to Care For, Improve and Maintain Your Home

Published by RSBPress • ISBN 0-9710356-0-1 • \$14.95

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