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A few simple things to know before your next relocation that will make a big difference

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I'm going to point out a few things about managing a major capital project that seem like common sense, but are hard to remember in the thick of a project. However, if you stick to them you'll get a better project.

When you find yourself assigned the capital project to deliver new office space for your company, you should ask yourself these questions prior to proceeding.

- Can I do this with my current staff and capabilities?
- What will its impact be on my current responsibilities and my staff?
- Is the prestige implied by completing this project with my current staff worth jeopardizing current responsibilities?
- Will I show better insight by acknowledging that we need qualified help to complete this project without sacrificing the current operations?

By the time you have answered these questions you have either determined that you want help or you have determined that you are overstaffed. If you have a lean staff you will not be able to complete a major project without outside help.

The outside help that you should

consider includes, yet is not limited to, an owner's representative, an architect and a real estate broker. Set high standards for performance and teamwork to ensure that the team succeeds.

Set about developing a strategic schedule that aligns the needs of your company with the process of delivering new space. Determine your timeline for evaluating real estate, negotiating a lease, developing a design, building the space and moving. Stand by that schedule. If one element falls behind, move the final completion date further into the future. It is easy to take longer than projected on early tasks, especially in the real estate search. But if early tasks get delayed, the final deadline will likely be affected.

When tasks—even early ones—get delayed, let all of the project stakeholders know. Advise everyone that the schedule is slipping and will need to be adjusted. By doing this you do two things. One, you reduce finger pointing when significant delays occur. Two, you are reinforcing the understanding that the schedule has importance, and that achieving the final deadline does not allow for a *laissez-faire* attitude at any point in the project.

With the strategic schedule established early and agreed to by all, you also avoid short-cutting phases, which can add to multiple problems in subsequent stages.

Now, it is time to establish a budget. It is tempting to create a budget before anything else, but

your timeline will help you create an accurate budget. Time is money. Your project will incur cost for each month that it is underway. Associating costs with the phases of your strategic schedule can be the foundation of your budget.

Having an unrealistic budget is the surest way to fail. Be sure that expectations are in line with the allocation. For instance, real estate costs fluctuate, and humans are naturally predisposed to think that we can get the lowest cost in a fluctuating market; do not underestimate relocation costs. Likewise, do not underestimate the costs to stay. Here are a couple of things to consider:

The cost of design, relocation and disposal of existing furniture/equipment are often underestimated. Many people think they know what these costs should be. In reality, it is only the architect, the moving professional or liquidator who can provide accurate estimates.

Most professionals, such as architects, attorneys and accountants charge on an hourly basis. However, architects and other construction industry professionals are usually expected to enter a fee upfront, before the real scope of the project is determined. And they are expected to stick by it, no matter what.

Owner's representatives often think they are doing their client a service by working down the architects' fee. What they are frequently doing is limiting the time an architect spends on the project. Most

design fees end up being less than the state sales tax on the project—reducing the time that an architect spends on a project does not save much money relative to the costs of the project. Decreasing the amount of time that an architect spends on your project may not be in your best interest. Balance your financial decisions when selecting architects and other construction industry professionals.

To choose the right value architect verify that you are getting the same effort from all firms who submit a proposal. Don't just ask, "Does this include everything?" Dig deeper, find out the hours and the experience level of designers scheduled for each phase of the project. More experience and higher billing rates will often bring more value to your project.

Your conclusion might be to accept the lowest fee. Or it might be to save money by hiring an architect who did not submit the lowest fee. Or you might decide to award more work later in the process, so that your project gets more attention if, and when, it needs it.

Your project will benefit if you decide to use outside help, make and keep a schedule that meets your needs, create a project budget based on that schedule and carefully select the team for value. These are common-sense points, but remembering them and sticking to them make a big difference.

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