



Coping With Relocation Anxiety

Moving homes at any age can be stressful. The organizational and physical tasks can be immense, and for older adults, this process can easily become overwhelming. Understanding the challenges seniors and their families will face while either transitioning to a new residence or making the necessary updates to a current home are why people are looking to senior move managers for assistance.

Before Anne Nieland became a senior move manager in Urbandale, Iowa, she was teaching art classes to senior citizens. That's where she fell in love with their demographic. She often heard her students talking about how they needed help moving and always volunteered to lend a hand. Nieland found this work to be incredibly rewarding. Eventually, her husband suggested she turn it into a business.

"I didn't realize there was an actual industry. I went to conferences, got a mentor, and job shadowed," Nieland says.

Now, Nieland finds herself constantly busy with her thriving company, Smart Senior Transitions. She says, "I am willing to do anything and everything for my clients," which can range from finding a trusted real estate agent within her treasure trove of contacts to the arduous job of setting up televisions.

A large portion of her time is spent going through what can be decades of clutter. She asks her clients, "Do you use it?" and "Can you part with it?" If they're willing to let it go, it ends up in the van, where Nieland's favorite saying comes into play, "The van makes things vanish."

For unwanted items, Nieland says, "I try to keep as much out of the landfill as possible." She can find



value in just about anything. She goes on to say that ripped or stained sheets are always needed at animal shelters, partially used cleaning products can go to a women's center, used glasses can be donated to a Rotary Club, and just about every client has a drawer full of discarded cables that can be dropped off at any Best Buy. If a client wants to try selling instead of donating, Nieland selects the best-suited consignment shop for that item.

It's inevitable that clients' emotions get brought to the surface while sifting through meaningful items. When Nieland was packing up a recently divorced client, they came across personal correspondence from her ex-husband. The client, understandably, got very upset. Nieland often faces clients who get angry, frustrated, and teary. She's learned how to pay attention to triggers and knows when to ease off.

Nieland says, "We're ripping open old wounds. It's a lot of listening and paying attention to how they're feeling. Sometimes you sit on the couch and let them cry. It's hard not to cry myself. The ride home is often in silence. No radio. No calls. Just deep breaths."

According to Nieland, it's challenging not to form personal relationships in this line of work. "It's virtually impossible not to become friends. They're so warm and appreciative," she says. She often hears from her clients long after a job has been completed. After hours of working together, they've developed a relationship, and clients will call to check on how she's doing.

What Exactly Does a Senior Move Manager Do?

Senior move managers are experts who specialize in resettling older adults and preparing them for a different lifestyle as they age. Essentially, they're project managers with extensive practical knowledge about the costs, available local resources, and obstacles that can arise when downsizing. While specific services vary, most senior move managers offer the following:

- House cleaning
- Waste removal
- Shopping
- Assistance with Realtor selection
- Helping to prepare a home to be sold
- Packing and unpacking
- Scheduling movers
- Donating or selling furniture
- Sending special keepsakes to family members
- Calling the cable company and other utilities
- Preparing a new home with safety features

But Nieland often finds herself going off-menu. She describes having an 88-year-old client who is in excellent health and has no intention of moving; instead, the client enlisted Nieland's help for after she passes. When that day comes, Nieland knows where everything needs to go and, most importantly, will be the one to oversee the welfare of George, the client's beloved dog. In addition to



providing comfort and peace of mind, Nieland is helping this client's family by relieving them of the burden and heartache of packing up their loved one's belongings.

Some families are geographically hindered and can't help their loved one pack and move. Senior move managers can be useful in this type of situation. They can figure out the best and most cost-effective way to ship items to family members and friends and, perhaps most importantly, they can be there as a comfort to help with the emotional element of relocating.

Talking Through Senior Living Options

Nieland assists her clients in determining whether they want to live independently in their current or new home or in an assisted senior living community. Often, older adults and their families are unaware of many of the costs associated with staying at home, while others might not know about all the options available for assisted living. However, Nieland never gets into the specifics of health care or offers financial advice regarding the cost benefits of options.

When an older adult decides to age in place, a senior move manager can help turn their home into a safer dwelling. Nieland recommends modifications such as, "getting them to cook with an induction stove [which uses magnetic fields and turns off when a pot or pan is removed], widening doorways, adding ramps, and raising items such as the washer and dryer."

A Network of Senior Move Managers

The National Association for Senior Move Managers (NASMM) is an excellent resource and networking tool. For example, Nieland had a client who was relocating to a different state. She was able to use the NASMM to find a trusted senior move manager operating in the client's destination state. This person assisted with the unpacking and setup of the client's new home. Both senior move managers worked as a team to accomplish the goals of the client.

In another instance, Nieland found herself having to crate and ship a rather large art piece. So, she turned to the community and asked, "I have a life-size statue of a horse, what do I do?" She ended up receiving some helpful tips, and the horse made it to its new home in one piece. When asked if having the responsibility of shipping treasured items makes her nervous, she replies, "It's like running a road race: you've prepared and you're confident in your resources, but you still have butterflies." Jokingly, she adds, "Also, I have liability insurance."

"Since this is an industry based on the needs of older adults, who can at times be vulnerable, it is important for the NASMM and all their members to follow a strict code of ethics. There is usually a free in-home evaluation, followed by a written estimate of the time and cost of a job, before any payment is processed. Some senior move managers charge on an hourly basis, while others prefer to package everything together at one price.

Being sensitive to this demographic, Nieland tailors each service, as well as her hourly rate, to every client's specific need. She advises clients not to sign the contract the same day, and she encourages



them to talk to their families before doing so.

While uprooting oneself from a well-lived-in home of many decades can be stressful and intimidating, it is a comfort to know there are caring people, like Nieland, willing to help with the transition.