

## Relocation need not be stressful

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Apart from a major accident such as a fire or other serious incident, there is nothing like a corporate relocation to pile up the work on the desk of the stress consultant. Suddenly, every employee in the organisation becomes a stress-victim to some degree or other. The effects often persist all day and night, because they involve both the workplace and the home. And this can go on for months, sometimes for years.

The reactions to a company relocation divide into four familiar stages.

First, shock at the news and the prospect of disruption. Second, the 'honeymoon' euphoria of discovering a fresh location. Third, adverse reaction to the loss of 'familiar furnishings'. Fourth, acceptance of the inevitable and adjustment to the new conditions.

Psychologically, these reflect a clash between our rational and irrational responses. We try to approach the move logically, viewing it partly as a physical endurance test, preparing for the heavy lifting and shifting, calculating the costs, planning all those endless chores and checklists. This means trying to shut out the emotive and sentimental side of it all. But these will rear up eventually because they are all part of the story.

This is all easily recognisable as a branch of change management, a major executive study that interacts with stress management.

The biggest relocation stress-load I ever had to handle involved a long-established manufacturer of jute products, in a town where jute had been the biggest industry for many years, and the jute community was a sort of royalty. (The works manager was third-generation in the job, and had been preparing his son to follow him). Then the company was bought by a big plastics group that found they could manufacture many of the products cheaper, so the jute engineers were suddenly classed as the second-division team.

This was a double psychological blow - to add to the stress of the move out of an old, established factory and into a new, large, shiny workshop building, more than a hundred miles away. But then I happened to remember an old lady whose father and husband had both been in the military, and I remember her telling me that on her 30th birthday, she had moved into her 30th army quarters!

On a whim, I asked her whether she would be willing to address an audience of managers and shop-floor workers on the subject of house-moving.

After hearing that charming and cultivated woman talking casually about jungle-lodges and barrack-huts, scorpions and malaria, their attitude abruptly changed, and I knew we were over the worst.

Finding a charismatic old lady to put young grumblers to shame? It's not one of the recognised anti-stress measures -but maybe it should be!

### Keypoints: Staying in control

- Relocation stress moves through four well-established phases.
- Reactions swing sharply between the rational and the irrational.
- Eventually people will accept and adjust to the new conditions.

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