

Ask the Expert

Q: Can you offer any ideas on how to communicate a move to a new office location? Construction will not be complete for another two years, but everyone wants to know where they will be sitting and what their workspace will be like.



A: Whenever a company announces that it's moving to a new location, every employee has 10 questions: the first question is, "What does it mean for me?" The second is, "What does it mean for me?" The third is...well, you can guess the remaining questions.

Given the personal nature of office moves, you need to instill a sense of control in people and manage their expectations. Control is key because, in essence, the move is a reminder that the company calls the shots. It can change one's work environment radically if it so chooses. Managing expectations is important to allay people's fears of the unknown and to paint a realistic picture of the new environment.

I once worked for a division of a company that relocated staff from corporate headquarters to an office park several miles away. The new office space took about nine months to prepare. During this time, staff who were moving – several hundred people, myself included – had lots of questions and concerns about the new environment and the implications of leaving corporate headquarters. Here's what we did to help put people at ease:

1. Surveyed all division employees to learn what was important to them in a new office location and what concerns they had about the move.
2. Set up a steering committee with representatives from all key staff groups: Finance, Marketing, HR, etc. I represented Communications. We met every two weeks and discussed goals for the move, the status of construction and any pressing issues and opportunities.
3. Distributed bi-weekly e-mail bulletins about the move. Rather than just describing what had been decided, these bulletins informed people about the issues under consideration and the direction the move was taking, e.g., how window space would be used, the design of common areas,

themes and artwork, and so forth. This enabled people to voice their opinions to committee members and influence the debate.

4. Created a special "relocation" section on the division's intranet. Here we housed the employee survey results, an archive of the email bulletins, photographs of the new site, maps of the area and related information.
5. Organized tours of the new offices, including an orientation session with the facilities manager, once construction was nearly complete.

By the time we finally made the move, nothing in the new environment was a surprise to anyone, and the change was pretty well accepted.

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