

Dignified Relocations

The field of senior move management is growing. Industry leader Mary Kay Buysse explains its value for real estate professionals.

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Senior move managers help older adults and their families with the often overwhelming process of downsizing and moving to a new home. How did this profession come into being? The Internet made it possible. In the late 1990s, a few people around the country were already quietly helping older adults

move from their long-time family homes into assisted living facilities or apartments. They found each other online. In 2002, 22 of them got together for a meeting in one of their living rooms in Arlington, Va., which led to the formation of the National Association of Senior Move Managers [of which Buysse now serves as executive director].

How do clients typically end up working with a senior move manager?

About half the time our members hear directly from an older adult or his or her adult child. The other half of the time, it's someone else like a family physician or a geriatric care manager or elder law attorney. Without a senior move manager, the first instinct of some adult children is to grab a box of garbage bags to get rid of things over a weekend. That's not serving a parent with dignity. People have a lifetime of possessions. They should

be disposed of with the same sort of thoughtfulness with which they were acquired.

Who's really the client of a senior move manager?

The client is the person in transition, even if the adult child makes the call or is the one paying. When possible, we want the older adult to do all the decision-making.

What are the misconceptions about this industry?

That it costs a lot of money to hire someone. The bulk of our member companies charge between \$60 and \$80 an hour. The total bill is usually no more than \$2,500. Families determine which parts of the job they need help with. They might only want help donating stuff they're not bringing with them or selling it at an estate sale or on eBay. Another misconception is that older adults think their grown kids want all their stuff. But kids typically don't want the porcelain Lladro collection or those kinds of valuables. They may only want a childhood blanket or a school yearbook.

How large is NASMM and what are the backgrounds of members?

We've grown to about 700 members in 10 years. Most come to this work through the personal experience of moving a family member. We have engineers, MBAs, social workers, and professional organizers. It's a great opportunity for real estate professionals who can offer this kind of one-stop shopping to their older clients. Our members must set up a company and carry liability insurance. They get involved in any part of the process except packing; we recommend they leave that to moving companies.

What's hardest about the job? Managers have to develop an unusual degree of intimacy with clients. They get into the nooks and crannies of clients' lives that even close relatives may not see. Often, they're called in during a time of crisis. The job isn't primarily about what happens on moving day. It's about getting ready for that day and helping people get established in their new home. *By Wendy Cole* ■

