

Three Steps to Moving in Stride

By Sara Graves

Not long ago, I found myself staring glassy-eyed at a pile of financial papers without the slightest clue of what to do to get organized. So I let my fingers do the walking and I did a little Internet research on how to get my finances organized. Little did I know then just how much I would learn (and later share with you) from the experience.

Now we are almost done with the year and again I am faced with another daunting task; but this time it's a move. And instead of waiting until the last minute, I've decided to let my fingers do the walking once again and I did a little Internet research on the subject to obtain some helpful moving tips.

And here's what I found.

Organizing a move is the same as organizing anything else in your household — except it is on a larger scale. I have discovered that there are three key components to any move: the information pertaining to the move, knowing what is placed in each box and keeping track of those items that need to be hand carried. The following is tips on how to organize these three key components.

The first step to any move is to establish what professional organizers and Cynthia Townley Ewer, the editor of OrganizedHome.com, call “Move Central.”

Move Central is nothing more than one centralized place or folder that holds all the information before, during and after the move. Whether it's your PCSing orders, the clean bill of health from your landlord or the name and number of the utility company at



your next duty station, if it pertains to the move at all, then it goes into your Move Central system.

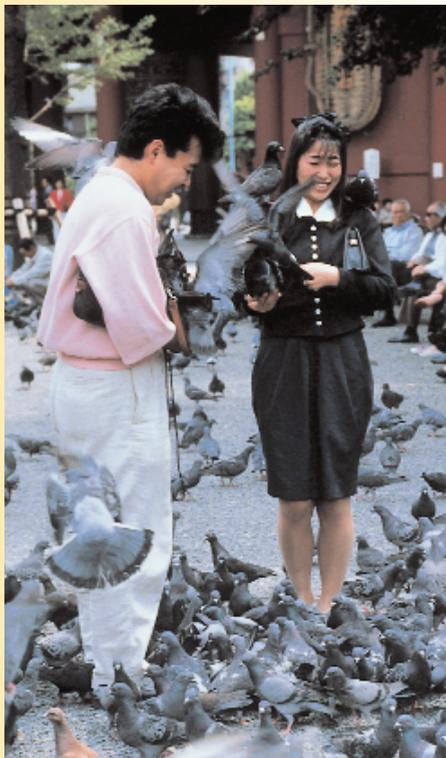
Your Move Central system must be set up according to your needs and tastes. It should incorporate something you can use to write down phone numbers or notes, store business cards and receipts, and anything else that comes up. A binder or personal planner notebook is an excellent choice for this system.

Your Move Central system is critical in every type of move. For those courageous DITY movers, your Move Central folder is vital for estimating your total truck weight, jotting down the weights during your journal, and keeping track of all your expenses for reimbursement.

Or for those of you using professional movers, be sure to stuff that itemized list of your belongings in your move central folder to check against once you arrive at your next duty station. You'll need it if you have to file a claim for any of your household goods.

Once you arrive at your next duty station, the information you store in your Move Central system can be used to turn on utilities, get reimbursed for your billeting stay and for enrolling your children in school and daycare on base. Or you can use it to jot down the name of your next-door neighbor who just graciously brought over some pizza and sodas as you were busy getting settled.

During my research on organizing a move, the second bit of advice that I consistently came across was Label, label, label —everything! Whether it be the outside of your Move Central folder or the outside of your moving boxes (we'll get to that in just a bit), www.organizedhome.com states that “you can never label too much.”



While an old-fashioned permanent marker will do to label boxes, technology has provided some better, more organized ways.

In this computerized generation, labeling is a snap. For those of us who can't label enough, personal label machines are a must. These handy devices usually spit out labels up to 1" tall that you type onto using a small keyboard. Label machines can be used to label plastic containers, boxes, notebooks, shelves—anything a

wanna-be organization guru can think of.

Or, if that's a little over the top, then a good old-fashioned computer will work magic.

Personally, during my last move, I found my desktop computer was vital to my system of organization. I happened to already have some large labels that were given to me; therefore, I created a sheet in Microsoft Word that fit those labels and typed

numbers that corresponded to the number of boxes we packed. I made the numbers very large (72-point type) and printed two for each box. Then as we packed each box, we would slap on the two box numbers—one on top and one on the side—and write on a master inventory sheet under that number (also created on my computer) what each box contained.

Therefore, when it came time to unload those boxes, I knew exactly which boxes needed to go into what room and what each box contained at a glance without having to move anything to rifle through the contents of each box. I simply looked at my inventory sheet, found the number that corresponded to that box and could see that box #75 had the turkey platter that Aunt Roseanne handed down to me that I wouldn't need until the following November. That went into the garage until I could unpack it later.

I suggest you photocopy your completed inventory list several times as a backup in case the first one is lost. Ideally, however, if you've created a Move Central-type system, you should be able to find it in there.

In hindsight, I would revise my system just a bit to print out separate labels that listed Kitchen, Living Room, Bedroom #1, Den, etc., in different colors. I would make oodles and oodles of labels for each room. (I found that two wasn't enough for each box when multiple boxes were stacked on one another. I still had to move some boxes around). Then as I was packing the kitchen, I would simply slap a kitchen sticker next to my number and I would know, again at a glance, that that box belonged in my kitchen at my next home. You can also buy preprinted room labels at your local U-Haul, moving supply store, or organization store, such as The Container Store (www.containerstore.com).

For those of you hiring movers, hand them your labels and instruct them to label each box according to its designated room, if that is not already their standard practice. If you're still determined to use that trusty marker, at least make your master list of boxes to ensure that a box or two does not come up missing.

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Last, but not least, our third step to a successful move, according to www.organizedhome.com and other professional movers, is to create an essentials box. It's like having a life preserver vest on a rocky sea.

To make it simple, the essentials box is everything you'll need to have before you and/or your household goods arrive at the next duty station. This may include anything from your sound machine to your BDUs to your child's favorite cartoon character DVD. Be creative and think hard about all the things that are necessary to make it through those first few days on the road or in temporary lodging.

Depending on your type of move, you may not have access to your belongings for weeks, or even months. Keep in mind, that the loan locker on many bases can provide you and your family with essentials once you arrive at your next duty station. Contact the family service center's loan locker at your new duty station for more specifics.

And I'd like to add one more bit of advice from this seasoned mover: designate certain boxes for items to be returned, donated or sold at a garage sale. Ideally this should be done well in advance of the move, but as most of us know, things fall through the cracks. There are always those last-minute items that must go somewhere, but you'd rather not throw in the garbage.

Hopefully, after you've read this and considered how to incorporate these ideas into your next move, you too will have gained some precious insight on how to make your next move go even smoother than your last.

For more helpful organization tips and resources, visit www.organizedhome.com or type organization or organized move into your Internet browser. I also found a number of excellent resources on the subject at my local bookstore.

If you have any excellent moving tips you'd like to share with other readers, we'd love to hear them.

