GLOBAL MOBILITY ADVISER

Six Mistakes to Avoid When Executing a Group Move

by Steven John, SCRP, SGMS-T

SIX MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN EXECUTING A GROUP MOVE

Every group move I've been part of has had one thing in common - emotion. Excitement, anxiety, curiosity, fear. Sometimes all of them at once.

It's easy to think of a group move as a business project. A checklist. A set of timelines, budgets, and benefit plans. But underneath every spreadsheet is a set of people whose lives are about to change. Families deciding whether to uproot. Managers trying to hold teams together. Leaders quietly wondering if they made the right call.

I've seen great companies stumble here - not because they lacked planning or resources, but because they forgot how deeply human these moments are. You can get every policy detail right and still lose the trust of your people if the process feels careless or rushed.

That's why I tell clients there's no such thing as a "neutral" group move. It either strengthens your culture or it shakes it. The difference usually comes down to the same thing: how well you anticipate and avoid the mistakes that others repeat again and again.

These are the six I see most often, and the ones that separate a move that succeeds from one that leaves a lasting scar.

Mistake #1: Not Knowing Your "Why"

Every successful group move I've seen starts with a clear reason for happening - and a clear reason for who's coming along.

It sounds simple, but it's the first thing that gets lost once the logistics take over. Someone decides the company needs to relocate a division or consolidate offices, and suddenly everyone is knee-deep in timelines and vendor calls before anyone has stopped to ask *why*.

That "why" drives everything else - your benefits design, communication plan, relocation packages, even how you talk about the move to your employees and the community. When the reason is vague, the strategy usually follows suit. I've seen companies spend millions on a move only to realize they were chasing convenience, not progress.

Be honest with yourself about the motivation. Are you moving because of a tax advantage or because the founder wants to live somewhere warmer? Is it about accessing a new labor market or cutting costs? There's nothing wrong with any of those answers - but you can't build an honest program without naming the truth first.

Group moves are expensive in every sense. Beyond the dollars, there's lost productivity, disengagement, and the quiet cost of losing good people who don't feel included in the vision. Understanding *why* you're doing it doesn't just clarify the numbers - it gives everyone involved a sense of purpose.

When employees can connect their own story to the company's reason for moving, you've already won half the battle. Without that connection, no amount of relocation benefits will make it feel right.

Mistake #2: Talking Too Soon

Once the word's out, you can't take it back.

I've watched more group moves unravel from early communication than from any other single mistake. The moment people hear the words "relocation" or "move," everything changes. Productivity drops. Rumors take off. Fear starts filling in the blanks that leadership hasn't filled yet.

When a group move is announced too soon, employees naturally start imagining worst-case scenarios - job loss, uprooting families, pay cuts, or being left behind. Even those who might benefit begin to feel uneasy because uncertainty spreads faster than information.

It's not just internal either. Communities, investors, and media circles react quickly. Once the story leaks, it takes on a life of its own. I've seen companies caught flat-footed, trying to calm speculation that never should have started in the first place.

Planning should begin quietly, with a small and trusted core team. Every meeting, every draft email, every whispered conversation carries weight. Keep it contained until you can communicate everything at once - the reasons, the timing, the impact, and most importantly, what it means for the people involved.

Announcing a move isn't about transparency for transparency's sake. It's about responsibility. Tell the story when it's complete, not when it's convenient. Because once you open that door, you don't get to close it again.

Mistake #3: Leaving People in the Dark

People can handle bad news. What they can't handle is uncertainty.

I still remember a time when a single afternoon turned calm teams into chaos because a move was announced before the details were ready. When employees are told "a relocation is coming" but nothing more, they fill in the blanks themselves - and what they imagine is almost always worse than the reality.

Silence breeds stories. Within hours, people start speculating about layoffs, cost cuts, and who's safe versus who's not. Productivity stalls because no one knows where they stand. Managers can't answer questions, and trust starts to erode in every direction.

The fix isn't complicated - it's preparation. Before any public announcement, have every critical detail locked in. Know your dates. Have severance and stay bonuses finalized. Be clear about relocation benefits and what support will be offered. Decide what happens to those who can't or won't move.

It's not about having perfect answers to every possible question. It's about showing employees that you've thought through the impact on their lives.

When people can see that there's a plan – even if it's a tough one – they can start making decisions for themselves and stay focused on the work in front of them.

I've learned that transparency doesn't weaken leadership. It strengthens it.

The moment employees realize you're being open and specific, the tension starts to ease. They may not like the news, but they'll trust that you're handling it honestly – and that trust is what keeps the company moving forward when everything else feels uncertain.

Mistake #4: Treating Everyone the Same

Fair doesn't always mean equal.

That's something I've had to remind even the most experienced HR and mobility teams of over the years. Group moves trigger a natural instinct to create one clean, uniform policy that applies to everyone. It feels efficient, it feels fair, and it feels safe. But in reality, it rarely works that way.

Different roles, different life stages, and different contributions all carry different needs. Relocating a senior leader with a family of five isn't the same as relocating a single new hire who's been with the company for six months. Treating both situations identically isn't fairness – it's avoidance.

The goal isn't to play favorites. It's to align resources with business outcomes. If the move is meant to tap into a new labor market or reduce overhead, it doesn't make sense to spend heavily relocating every employee. In some cases, a generous severance or retention package may be a better investment than relocation support.

The key is to make those decisions intentionally and transparently. Explain how the policy was structured, what the goals are, and why some employees may receive different levels of support. People understand differentiation when it's rooted in logic and communicated with respect. What they won't tolerate is silence or inconsistency.

When handled well, tiered benefits don't create resentment – they create clarity. Employees know where they stand, and they see that leadership has a plan instead of a blanket rule. That clarity builds confidence, and confidence is what holds a group together when everything else feels like it's shifting.

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Mistake #5: Forgetting the Balance

Every group move is a balancing act.

You're not just managing relocation benefits or severance packages – you're managing emotions, loyalties, and livelihoods. Get the balance wrong, and the entire effort can tilt off course before the first box is packed.

I've seen companies focus so heavily on relocation benefits that they forget about those who can't move. No matter how generous the package, some employees simply can't uproot their lives.

Family ties, spousal employment, medical needs, or community roots can make relocation impossible. When those employees are left with inadequate severance or stay bonuses, they disengage long before their final day – and the business suffers for it.

Then there's the other side of the scale. Offer too much severance, and you risk draining your workforce before the transition even starts. People will choose the quick payout over uncertainty, and suddenly you're trying to run critical operations with half your staff gone.

The goal is to find the middle ground where both options make sense. Relocation should feel attainable and worthwhile for those willing to move, and severance should feel respectful and fair for those who can't.

Strong job markets may require more incentives to keep people engaged; weaker ones may not.

There's no formula for perfect balance, but there is a mindset: respect both paths equally. One isn't a reward and the other isn't a consolation prize. Both are ways of honoring an employee's contribution to the company. When you treat them that way, people notice. They remember that they were considered, not calculated.

Mistake #6: Going It Alone

Group moves are some of the most complex transitions a company can undertake. They touch every part of the organization - people, systems, finances, reputation. Yet time after time, I see leadership teams try to navigate them alone.

It usually starts with good intentions. Someone says, "We know our people best, we can handle it internally." But soon, small details start slipping through the cracks – inconsistent messaging, unclear benefits, missed deadlines. What began as a confident in-house project quickly becomes a daily scramble to put out fires.

I’ve learned that experience is what turns a group move from chaos into coordination. There’s no substitute for people who’ve done it before, who know the pressure points and the timing, and who understand how to protect both the company and its employees through every phase of the process.

Bringing in experts isn’t an admission that your team can’t handle it. It’s an acknowledgment that the stakes are high and that a steady hand matters.

An outside perspective can catch what’s invisible to those too close to the situation. It can save you money, time, and credibility - but more importantly, it can save your people from unnecessary stress and confusion.

I’ve been on both sides of that equation, and I can tell you this: the organizations that seek guidance early are the ones that finish strong. They communicate clearly, transition smoothly, and keep their workforce intact. Those that try to go it alone often end up learning the hard way - and by then, it’s too late to rebuild the trust that was lost.

The Right Way Is the Thoughtful Way

Group moves test everything about leadership - timing, communication, empathy, and trust. They’re not just about where a company is going but how it chooses to get there.

I’ve led moves that fractured teams and others that brought them closer together. The difference was never the size of the budget or the number of consultants. It was the thoughtfulness behind every decision.

When leadership treats the process as a partnership with its people instead of a transaction, that’s when real trust takes root.

When done right, a group move can be more than a logistical success - it can be a moment that defines a company’s culture for years to come. It shows employees that leadership can make hard decisions and still care about the people affected by them.

The truth is, there’s no perfect blueprint for a move like this. But if you lead with honesty, plan with intention, and communicate with empathy, you’ll find that the right way is usually the thoughtful one.

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