



DOWNSIZING SHOULDN'T BE A DOWNER

So you've lived in your house for decades—collecting a whole lot of stuff along the way—and now you're moving to a place without a basement or an attic or even another level? Consider hiring an expert to ease the burden.

By Ann Cochran

ON A CHILLY DAY IN DECEMBER 2016, MY NEWLY retired husband and I signed a contract to build a home for the next phase of our lives in Lewes, Delaware. Still dizzy from that major decision, we met with our real-estate agents to create a timeline for getting our old house on the market. It was obvious right away that we'd need professional help to declutter our four-bedroom in Cabin John.

I'd written articles about professional organizers—including a category called move managers, who specialize in helping people downsize. Their clients go to and from all kinds of living arrangements: from mansions in Potomac to condos in Bethesda, from longtime family homes to assisted living. We were moving to another four-bedroom, but it was about a thousand

square feet smaller with a different style and floor plan.

The National Association of Senior Move Managers is a good resource, with an online search function to find pros near you, but Chuck and I interviewed people from a few companies I'd already heard about. We chose Let's Move of Fulton, Maryland, because we felt so comfortable with Susan Mooney, the project manager with whom we met.

Move managers will do as little or as much as you like, from a four-hour consultation to a soup-to-nuts move that starts with decluttering and ends with putting art on the walls and sheets on the beds.

Our job started with a schedule of four-hour sessions, three times a week for three weeks, at \$65 an hour. (Let's Move has

since increased its rates a bit.) Our typical homework between sessions was to review a clothes closet or set of bookshelves, separating things into “keep,” “donate,” and “trash.”

As we got used to having help, we found ourselves adding on more time and services, such as the staging of our old house and two days of unpacking in Lewes. We paid the extra travel costs to make sure the same women who had helped us in Cabin John unpacked us in our new home—which proved to be worthwhile. I e-mailed them a few times long after we moved and asked where they thought a certain pillow or a set of tent poles might be. They either instantly knew or set us on the right path to finding every item.

I again called on Mooney—who has worked at Let's Move for more than a decade—to answer a few key questions about professional downsizing help.

What are the primary benefits of using a move manager?

Moving is one of the most stressful events in a person's life. Having a dedicated consultant by your side reduces the emotional stress of moving and the risk of physical injury. Let us do the lifting, carrying, and climbing on step stools or ladders. Next, it's easier to be ruthless, or at least decisive, about downsizing when you're with another person who is objective. Another benefit is that a move manager keeps you on track. When you pay for and schedule help, things happen.

How do potential clients know how much help they need?

Budget may be the determining factor, but professional move managers are experts at estimating what it will take to declutter and pack up different sizes and styles of homes and people. Let's Move alone has completed more than 5,000 projects.

How can clients save money while still using a move manager's services?

The easiest way is to get started before we come. As a first step, target an unemotional area like the linen closet. During the process, do extra homework between visits from the team. By making more decisions on your own, you won't be discussing as much during the sessions. Our team is professionally trained to pack in an organized

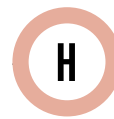
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and efficient manner, so it doesn’t pay for clients to do that work. Plus, any belongings packed by our team are insured, but belongings packed by clients are not. Arranging for donation pickups and sorting through and categorizing paperwork, photos, and memorabilia are great areas to manage on your own because they take time and are so personal.

My friends say their adult children don’t want their furniture and other collectibles. What should people do with valuables they’ll no longer have room for?

Because this is a common problem, we often gently educate people about the lack of interest in most vintage and antique items, as well as formal entertaining accoutrements. Lots of sterling-silver flatware is being melted down for its cash value. We can help with sales—usually consignment, or an estate sale if the quantity warrants it. Ultimately, donations might feel like the best option.

Are downsizing services designed mainly for seniors?

That has been the case, but the client base is expanding. Younger clients who are overextended with careers and children are seeing the value of paying for a move manager’s project planning, just as they pay for life coaches and personal trainers. Gen X and millennial clients might tend to do more of the physical work on their own but benefit from professional advice and assistance with the process. **W**

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