

Scaling Down Almost Painlessly

Moving to a smaller house or apartment in a retirement community can be traumatic for all involved. Moving in general is stressful, and on top of that having to uproot from familiar settings can be painful. However, planning ahead can make it a more pleasant experience for everyone.

Begin by Planning for the Move

Plan ahead by going to the house or apartment where the elder is moving and write down measurements for floor and ceiling space. Determine how much available space you will have in order to decide which pieces of furniture can move with your elder.

While you're at the actual location, talk to several other elders who already live there. What is their life style? Do they go outside the property on frequent trips? How do they dress? It will be helpful to find out how your elder will be able to relate to others in the community.

Gather Supplies and Contact Helpers

Organizing your supplies into a certain place will help everything move more smoothly and quickly. You'll want a number of storage bins; five or six should be sufficient to hold sorted items. Plastic bags can be used for discarded belongings and for articles to be donated to charities. Packing boxes and supplies

such as padding materials and wide sealing tape are must-haves. Labels and dark marking pens are essential to ensure that boxes go to their intended location.

While you're in the gathering stage, begin to contact helpers you'll need. Among these may be:

- Estate sale professionals
- Certified appraisers
- Moving companies
- House cleaners
- Repair specialists (electricians, plumbers, carpenters, painters)

Ask friends, relatives, and senior real estate specialists for recommendations. Also, check with the Better Business Bureau to ascertain whether problems have been reported about particular companies or individuals.

Approach Your Task One Room at a Time

The elder and one family member should assume responsibility for sorting all items and some packing. Not everyone in the family needs to be involved. Having too many involved will only cause more distractions and slow down the process.

Sort all the items in one single room at once, beginning

and ending in the kitchen. Why start there? Because kitchens in small houses and apartments typically are short on storage space, and the elder needs time to determine which items are true necessities, and which may never be used. Reduce kitchen items to the bare minimum so that your elder can decide which items are necessities. After living with fewer items, your elder may find that items once thought essential may not be needed. Complete work in the kitchen at the very end of your tasks.

Make your motto One Thing at a Time; One Time for each Thing. Once you've picked up an item, decide then and there what its fate should be. Place it in one of the bins you've labeled:

- Discards
- Donations
- Distribution to Relatives
- Keepers
- Uncertainties

Large collections of books may require their own bins. You might have bins for Collectors' editions, books to be stored, and books to be sold to book dealers.

When you have finished categorizing all the items in the room, start the packing process. Items in the Uncertainties bin can be packed for storage. If an unbreakable item is to be moved only a short distance, don't waste time on elaborate packing and padding. Items like crystal and china, however, require excellent packing regardless of the distance they will be moved. If you do not trust yourself with packing fragile items, leave it to the professionals.

Mark Boxes As You Go

Nothing is more frustrating than finding that you've shipped your elder's bed linens to Aunt Minnie and kept a silver salver you meant to send your nephew.

Don't try to do everything at once. Do only one room on any given day, and take the time to enjoy reminiscing as you sort items.

This is also the perfect time to have a certified appraiser come in to appraise items that may be of significant value. Very expensive items may be auctioned at an auction house such as Christy's or Sotheby's. Less expensive items can be sold to local antiques dealers. By having an idea of their value before going to dealers, you reduce the chance of being scammed by a dealer.

You could also consider selling items through an on-line auction. If you do so, remember that you will be responsible for shipping items and ensuring their condition to successful bidders.

Distribute Items to the Intended Recipients

Schedule a single day for distribution of items. In-town relatives can come to pick up items intended for them; they may also be helpful by taking bags to charities, books to resellers, boxes to storage, and trash to dumps.

Also, use this day to do shipping. Small items can be shipped via UPS or FedEx; large pieces of furniture and antiques may require special handling by movers. Once you've finished distribution, you should have a considerably reduced pile of boxes and furniture. These boxes should contain only items to be moved to the elder's new residence or to storage. Remaining items should be those to be sold in an estate sale.

Move the Elder to His New Residence

There is always a question of whether the mover will show up on time or at all. However, you can increase the probability of a good outcome by confirming the arrangement with the mover a week ahead, as well as the day before the move. Of course, missed appointments may still occur, but if you've checked out the company with the Better Business Bureau and reminded the company of your appointment, the chances are good that the move will go as planned.

Accompany your elder to his new residence and help him with the moving-in process. Even if not all boxes can be emptied in a single day, they will feel more comfortable if a few items that are meaningful to them are unpacked and placed where they can find them.

Hold an Estate Sale

Once the movers have left the premises, the estate sale professionals should come in to evaluate and price items for the estate sale. Give them a key to the house, and allow them space to work. If you have a chosen well, these professionals will know how to price items to sell and clear the house of whatever remains. They will take a percentage of the sale receipts as compensation.

The days of the sale are good days to keep your elder busy elsewhere. It could be a painful experience for the elder, and if they become emotional it won't help the sales.

Schedule a professional cleaning service to clean the house once the estate sale is over. When that has been completed to your satisfaction, turn the keys over to your senior real estate professional and give yourself a big pat on the back. You're done!