



IS THE GRASS *Greener?*

Switching Between the Corporate and Supplier Sides

By Thomas A. Whitaker, CRP, SGMS

The mobility industry encompasses clients and suppliers, and while we are different in many ways, we share similar experiences and knowledge every day. Perhaps you have wondered: *What would it be like to work on the other side?*

Is the grass greener there? This article delves into that question by exploring the issue from a salary, benefits, work/life balance, and cultural fit perspective from 10 individuals who have experienced both sides.

CLIENT/SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS

Much has been written about the client/supplier relationship. In any industry, the supplier is beholden to the corporate client. Suppliers may feel as if their position is subservient, as they are always trying to please others. But if you speak in depth to a corporate representative in a mobility function, you will feel and hear similar sentiments. Just like the supplier, corporate employees also feel beholden to others. Most of their customers may be fellow employees, but they are no less demanding.

Those who have made the switch from corporate to supplier or supplier to corporate positions are a minority in our industry, as most people tend to stay on one side or the other. However, those who have experience on both sides seem to place more importance on service and partnership.

Jannette Andrews, director of global mobility at TeleTech, a global business process outsourcing company, emphasizes, "Having been on the service provider side, I know what they go through, their expertise, and their challenges. I have a respect for what they do. I need them to accomplish my objectives, and I feel that my experience on both sides adds value to what I do on a daily basis."

While numerous articles have been written about the mutual respect that should exist between corporates and suppliers, how do these respective roles compare from a salary perspective?

SALARY

Jean Strickland, CRP, president and CEO of global executive and talent acquisition consulting firm Signature Source, adds insight when it comes to income and pay. Having helped hundreds of people find work in both corporate and supplier positions, she explains, "Perhaps more than 'which side,' salary is based on your level at your current employer and what experience you bring to your new company. We find that at the customer service or entry level, salary is reasonably the same. At midlevel and upper management, base compensation is higher on the corporate side and comparable from a total compensation perspective."

Companies with 5,000 employees or more often have more complex hierarchical internal structures



and a greater variety of salary positions and ranges. On the supplier side of the relocation industry, organizations that large do not exist. Even the largest relocation supplier, Cartus, has only 3,000 employees according to their Facebook page. More commonly, a supplier has no more than a few hundred employees.

Strickland adds, "In the senior level and the VP level and above, the compensation becomes more comparable than the disparity we see in the midlevel and upper-level positions, but the ranges get wider on the corporate side based on experience, compared to the service provider side. For instance, a salary range on the supplier side for a senior-level or VP-level position might range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 on the supplier side, compared to \$100,000 to \$200,000-plus on the corporate side, depending on experience."

BENEFITS

According to *HR Magazine* in February, cost growth for benefits in 2013 was slow—about 1 percent—for small employers, defined as those with 10 to 499 employees. This description typifies nearly all relocation supplier organizations. The same article says that "among very large organizations (those with 5,000 or more employees), benefits rose 3.7 percent." Many companies that choose to utilize relocation services have more than 5,000 employees. Therefore, corporate mobility professionals, as a result of working in what are typically larger companies, may also have an advantage regarding benefits.

Jason Exley, PHR, vice president, business development, with Mobility Services International (MSI), made the switch from corporate to supplier in 2013. "Perhaps the corporate side holds the advantage when it comes to benefits," he agrees. "The smallest corporate organization I worked for had 25,000 employees. With that size of organization, it is different. With bigger companies come a lot more benefits or perks such as gym membership, dry cleaning pickup, child care on-site, or discount memberships."

The corporate advantage for benefits extends to more than just gym memberships. Nearly every corporate representative interviewed for this article mentions that benefits such as stock options, 401(k) matching levels, and profit-sharing models were all more advantageous on the client side.

David Barlow, SCRP, SGMS, retired—formerly with Chevron and SIRVA and one of 46 inductees in the Worldwide ERC® Hall of Leaders—has had terrific

careers that included 35 years on the corporate and 13 years on the supplier side. "It is difficult making a statement absent any hard data," he says, "but generally speaking, during my time on the supplier side I think it was pretty obvious that most of my industry associates did not have some of the benefits that most corporates enjoy—more vacation days, holiday schedules—and most corporate-side employees probably feel like they have more job security."

Barlow's point regarding the absence of hard data is well-taken. However, it seems clear that if only salaries and benefits are compared, the grass does indeed seem greener on the corporate side.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Strickland calls work/life balance "a very personal topic." She adds, "The balance depends on the person and the company culture. Take two individuals, and one's work ethic will be different than the other's. The perception is that on the supplier side there exists a better work/life balance, but that's not necessarily the case. The individual, employer, personal goals, direct manager, co-workers, time of year, and organizational culture all affect the definition of work/life balance."

Chris Barnett, CRP, GMS, market development manager with AMBER Lodging Co., has also worked on both sides. "Someone can be a workaholic if they want, regardless of what role they play," he says. "Some supplier roles may require you to work at midnight or 2 a.m. on occasion. In the corporate environment, I feel there is more pressure to be present *in the office* till 7 or 8 p.m."

Sharon Byrnes, GMS-T, worked on the supplier side before returning to the corporate side. "When it comes to work/life balance, I personally don't see a difference," says Byrnes, now director of talent mobility for Bristol-Myers Squibb. "On both sides you need to be flexible and available to those you serve. Perhaps it differs more with regard to whom you serve—domestic versus international employees. More important than *how much* time, is how you *spend* your time. Everyone needs to make their own decision when it comes to work and family balance."

"I really enjoyed working on the supplier side," HR generalist Cherie Ashe, PHR, recalls. "They were great about focusing on work/life balance. But I didn't like the controlled environment. In my supplier experience, we couldn't even write sticky notes—it had to be an email with a time stamp. Now I don't have to follow



the recipe' as much. I can experiment with my own recipe and see what works. In an ISO or Six Sigma environment, you don't really need to think; you just follow the steps to get it done. In my current HR role, I feel freer to create my own programs."

"Speaking from my own personal experience, I feel that there is definitely better work/life balance on the supplier side," says Stephanie Alisuag-Schreiber, mobility programs manager for Salesforce.com. "Corporations generally offer better benefits, but that is an outgrowth of them being bigger companies. There perhaps is the trade-off. On the supplier side, you are proud of the brands you serve, your clientele spectrum. On the corporate side, you mainly represent your brand. The opportunity I had to work on both sides was valuable for my career."

Most of the corporate representatives interviewed for this article were not permitted to work from home—even though many of the supplier representatives interviewed had experienced some kind of work-from-home arrangement at some point in their careers. While this is not always the case, Barlow agrees, "There was a difference. I believe the possibility of working from home is far advanced on the supplier side. On the corporate side, there was this 'we have a building and you will work here' feeling."

CULTURAL FIT

There are differences in culture between corporations and suppliers in the mobility industry, but much of this is a consequence of the size of the respective organizations. Culture at a supplier company with 200 people is not so much a product of being a supplier company as it is of being a small company. Likewise, culture at a corporate entity with 20,000 employees is not so much a product of being corporate as it is of being a large company. Generally speaking, the main differences between small and large companies are bureaucracy (control over your work), political environment, and relative impact.

Bureaucracy is not necessarily a bad thing, as it needs to exist in larger, older, and more mature organizations. They've learned some lessons the hard way—and to prevent future mishaps, rules have been created. These rules are meant to help staff stay within the guidelines and create a more controlled, lower-risk environment.

Political environment is also very different between small and large companies. Generally, the larger an organization, the more complex it is. "In speaking with our corporate candidates, they appear to be faced with a more complex political environment," Strickland says. "This could be due to the streamlining and/or flattening of organizational structures that

SOLUTIONS THAT MOVE YOU FORWARD



Whether he's a recent college grad or she's your top executive, we treat all of your transferees like VIPs.



65 Offices in the U.S. and Canada 888-411-4282 WWW.FORWARDRELOCATION.COM

Domestic Moving | International Moving | Container | Van | LTL | Intermodal | Small Shipments
Expedited Shipping | Storage | Auto Shipping | 3rd Party Services



**FORWARD
RELOCATION**
Forward Thinking • Forward Moving



we have seen evolve in most supplier organizations since 2009. Culture is key to either side. Some organizations are truly dedicated to a culture where the employees are valued, regardless of the level. Culture is the running aquifer of talent management and talent acquisition. It is most important of all to success and happiness in a position, but it is also the most hidden until an individual is hired and immersed into their new role.”

“DO YOU WANT TO FEEL LIKE A BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND (SUPPLIER), OR A TINY FISH IN A BIG POND (CORPORATE)?”

Relative impact means how much effect a person can have within an organization. Brenda Rodriguez of Be Connected USA, who has a 20-year history on the corporate side, comments, “The biggest difference for me is, do you want to feel like a big fish in a small pond (supplier), or a tiny fish in a big pond (corporate)? In a smaller company you have a better chance of growing your ideas, and in a big company your ideas will be harder to get acknowledged, or [they will] lack priority. On the supplier side, you have a much better chance of working with upper management and making an impact. On the corporate side, it can feel like a revolving door of management changes, company goals and objectives, and new initiatives that seemingly take priority over running the business of mobility. You are expected to fill a role;

depending on the culture of the company, you may or may not see a seed that you plant grow before you are off on another project.”

A thorough understanding of role and responsibility, exchange of power and empowerment, levels of freedoms—all these make up culture as well. Several corporate representatives mention “perceived empowerment, opposed to actual empowerment.” Strickland observes, “In the corporate entities there are many political ladders, like spider webs. While these webs exist within every organization, our corporate candidates seem to share more about the challenges facing them more often than supplier candidates.”

By the nature of his position, Johnny Haines, SCRIP, SGMS-T, senior manager at professional services firm Deloitte, seemed to fit on both sides of our conversation. He is a mobility lead at Deloitte for an in-house team that is responsible for developing the policy and administering it internally for all relocating Deloitte employees. He feels his position is more demanding than that of the suppliers he works with. “The supplier only has to deal with me. However, I have to deal with leadership, management, and employees,” he says.

“If there is one thing I’d tell someone who wanted to get into our industry, it’s that it’s not as hard as it might seem to change from corporate to supplier,” Rodriguez adds. “It was an easy decision for me, because I had been partners with the company [for which] I now work for years, and I felt strongly about their leadership and service offering. It was easy to engage with someone I’ve known and worked with for a decade. Also, I was intrigued by the relative impact I could make on the company after so many years on the corporate side.”

Barlow agrees. He had a career at Chevron for more than 30 years before joining SIRVA late in his career. “It used to be pretty rare that you would see someone switch from the corporate side to the supplier side or even vice versa, but it seems more common now. If you haven’t worked on both sides, you cannot have a 100 percent knowledge of what it is like on the other side. I believe that experience and that dual exposure is very valuable in today’s marketplace.”

‘UNDERSTAND YOUR PASSION’

While there is insufficient statistical data to prove which side truly has the greener grass, in speaking with individuals who have experienced both sides,



each seems to have its pros and cons. Corporates have an advantage perhaps in salary and benefits because of their employer's size, while suppliers perhaps have the advantage in work/life balance and job flexibility. However, the impact of the manager relationship, corporate culture, and position level play a huge part in determining all of these pieces. In the end, success is made by each individual, and great success can be found on both the corporate and supplier sides. Gaining new skills, such as acquiring the CRP® and GMS® designations, and acquiring more knowledge will enable progression, whether inside or outside your current organization.

When it comes to these aspects of our industry, we can open the playing field and give much more opportunity to each other in our various capacities as we explore mobility and its options, not just as suppliers and clients, but also as skill earners and achievers. Broaden your horizons by learning new things. Find better, faster, and safer ways to accomplish what we are already doing. Expand skill sets and learn new knowledge to become more valuable in your current role and more capable for future roles. Finding the right fit and happiness is different

for everyone. Salary, excitement about daily work, social responsibility, being perceived well in the marketplace, feeling empowered to make decisions, flexibility of schedule, access to leadership, impact on the bottom line—all these things individually affect quality of work and quality of life.

Rodriguez sums it up, "Understand your passion, and understand why you are in the industry. It is not flashy. It is hard work. If you have a passion about really wanting to deliver services and you feel good about helping people—regardless of whether you are on the corporate or supplier side—this will be a field of work that brings a huge amount of satisfaction, and that you want to be a part of." *M*

Thomas Whitaker, CRP, SGMS, works for Odyssey Relocation. He is the president of the Inter-mountain Relocation Council in Salt Lake City. He can be reached at +1 801 974 7833 or by email at twhitaker@odysseyrelo.com. Whitaker thanks Stephanie Alisuag-Schreiber, Jannette Andrews, Cherie Ashe, David Barlow, Chris Barnett, Sharon Byrnes, Jason Exley, Johnny Haines, Brenda Rodriguez, and Jean Strickland for their contributions to this article.



RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Pet moving made easy.®

Nationwide • Worldwide

800.635.3448

www.airanimal.com

Learn about our comprehensive service and check out our testimonials!



© 2014 Air Animal, Inc. All Rights Reserved.