

China Perspective: Six Tips for Removals Managers

By Thomas Coupat, AGS



On January 24, those of us in China were thrown off the deep end—instead of preparing for Chinese New Year's Eve the next day, we all learned a new expression: “奉城.” This means “locked city” and on that

morning, we found out that Wuhan was now “locked;” no one was allowed to leave. Within two days, the rest of Hubei province, with a population of more than 50 million, was also put under lockdown in order to contain the new virus.

I was in China during the SARS outbreak and at first, we thought this would be a similar crisis. Of course, it was somewhat worrisome, but SARS had not disrupted our lives much. Over the following week, however, more restrictions were enacted and it quickly became clear that this coronavirus was much more contagious than its SARS “cousin.”

The government ordered all schools and all non-essential businesses closed from January 25 to February 10. In most of the country, businesses started to reopen on or about February 10. We packed our first clients in Guangzhou on February 12, and another in Shanghai a couple days after that. Part of the country was slower to reopen and the lockdown of Wuhan lasted 76 days. In places like Shanghai, where I am located, things were pretty much back to normal by the second week of March, although schools remain closed.

Given that we are ahead of the cycle, I hope some of the experiences I have had over the last couple of months can be useful for industry colleagues who are further back in the pandemic cycle. Here are a few tips:

1. **Don't be afraid of the unknown:** This pandemic is unprecedented, and none of us know exactly how events will unfold. What we can do is take things a day at a time and focus on short- and medium-term goals. Don't hesitate to ask others for advice; reach out to IAM members in China, Hong Kong, and South Korea, and ask for their advice. All these locations are several weeks ahead of the rest of the world in this pandemic and their advice might be germane to you.
2. **You are no longer a manager but a coach:** In a time of crisis like this, you need to ensure more than ever that your team is engaged

A feature story focusing on the COVID-19 crisis would not be complete without a glimpse of the what the later stage of the pandemic will look like and how we will go about arriving at a new normal. For that perspective, we offer this final submission from a member located in Wuhan—the city at the epicenter of the pandemic—which has begun to emerge from lockdown and is beginning to see a resurgence of business.

and motivated. Take care of their safety and be honest with them about what challenges lie ahead. You might be surprised by which of your team members rise up to the challenges brought about by this crisis. Normally, we advise people to leave their problems at home, but if you are working remotely then this is of course not possible. Be patient with your team and show empathy. Two of my staff have had children in the last two months, including my Wuhan manager; coaching a person during that period is critical and can be stressful for all of us. Both of them have been brilliant throughout, and we were all gratefully welcome two healthy newborn girls into our “AGS family.”

3. **Don't let fear paralyze you:** COVID is an extremely serious virus, but try to keep fear and stress at bay as much as possible and stay positive. If local conditions and the authorities, allow you to work, then as long as you can do it safely, do it and let your industry partners know you can. Progress rarely happens in a straight line, and you will find that maybe some restrictions will be lifted only temporarily at first. Don't let that demoralize you, and focus on day to day operations and operating as “normally” as possible through this crisis.
4. **Become an expert:** No one planned for this pandemic, but now that it is here, do your best to become informed about how to protect your teams and clients, and ensure that these measures stay in place as long as needed. The pandemic isn't moving at the same speed across the globe, so it is essential that you be the expert of what is possible and allowed on your home turf and that you broadcast that to your clients and partners. Ensure though that you focus your expertise on how COVID affects removals and mobility services. This is expertise that should help you operate safely and allow you to convert business. For example, in China, we had to figure out quickly what was needed for us to be up and running again and how to operate safely, as well as change our processes so that we could ensure that prior to any service we had filed the right documents with each local neighborhood committee to be authorized to work on each site.

5. **Be a consultant to your clients (agents / corporates):** Our sales people all need to up their game in a time like this. On top of their usual skills, they now need to become consultants and advise clients on what is positive and what isn't and try to find a way to make requests possible. Right now, one of the main issues in China is the lack of air cargo space available, so we are advising accounts and partners to convert air shipments into sea. It is better to have a sea shipment than no shipments. Be proactive about this so that you can book the shipments that can move right now.
6. **Be open minded and flexible:** This is not a time for us to think "I am only a moving company". If you have trucks then you are a transport company. If your clients are stuck abroad and are not able to come back and they need someone to feed their pet or take care of their home and you are able to do that, then this should be a service you can offer if local conditions allow it. If your clients cannot come back for a packing, then develop a remote packing program. The situation with COVID is fluid so that you may need to change tack frequently. When we first re-started operations in Shanghai, we had to check at different levels whether each local neighborhood would allow us to operate. By the end of March, this was no longer an issue as the local government official downgraded the emergency response level. Recently, however, a couple of communities across the cities reinstated some tougher

checks. This will happen elsewhere before this crisis is over and we should just be prepared for the unexpected and tackle it as positively as we can.

The last 10 weeks have been a whirlwind as what had started as a China problem has by now developed into a global crisis and our China team has gone from being the only one unable to work to being one of the few that can work freely. At the same time, we have also been tapped as experts by several of our colleagues around the world. We could brush it off and say that we are "busy" and back at work, but this is a time for people to come together, so we are all happy to share our experiences if it can help people, and we are happy to extend the same courtesy to all IAM members. 🌍

In What Other Ways Are IAM Members Responding?

Beyond delivering or storing critical supplies, other IAM members are sharing useful information on how to navigate this complex global situation. Interconex has compiled a 12-page resource detailing the border closures, port status, and HHG operating status for many countries around the world; follow Interconex on LinkedIn for updates.

From a visual perspective, the Keller Swiss Group is displaying the status of moving and relocation operations, freight capacity, and immigration restrictions by country on a world map. Navigate to kellerswissgroup.com/corona to access the map directly.

got crates?

Products

liftvans
motorcycle crates
overflow boxes
storage vaults
sofa boxes
state department boxes

Capabilities

next day shipping
international
domestic including Hawaii

All wood products meet ISPM-15 Guidelines

Liftvans manufactured in North Carolina, Texas, and California for convenient exporting



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