



2025 Atlas® Forum Recap

GENERAL SESSIONS

CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME WITH JACK GRIFFIN

Jack Griffin, Chairman and CEO of Atlas® World Group, opened the 56th Atlas Forum on Moving™ by welcoming relocation professionals and introducing this year's theme: "Discover Tomorrow." This theme comes at a critical time, as 93% of companies surveyed in the [58th Corporate Relocation Survey](#) reported using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their work.

With that in mind, Jack introduced his version of ChatGPT – an "AI" friend named JP – as a way to share other key findings from the industry's first and longest-running survey into corporate relocation policies and practices. These included insight into relocation volume, return to office plans, and challenges employers and employees face when it comes to relocation.

This year's survey found 55% of companies reported an increase in relocation volumes in 2024, signaling a strategic emphasis on talent mobility. Additionally, it showed 60% of companies surveyed had a full on-site return to work plan starting in 2025. However, family issues/ties were the leading reason for employees to decline a relocation offer. Concerns about housing and mortgage rates at the new location were another challenge companies cited.

As a result of these factors, companies are moving beyond structured relocation packages and procedures in favor of more customizable options. This requires an innate level of expertise to meet individual needs and retain top talent in organizations. While AI tools can enhance capabilities within the workplace, it is important to remember they will not replace mobility professionals' expertise, which will guide us in discovering tomorrow.

Erica Dhawan

Erica Dhawan, an internationally recognized leading authority, speaker and advisor on 21st century teamwork, collaboration and innovation, took the stage as the first keynote speaker. Her talk addressed how, as industry leaders, relocation professionals can create a better "normal" by focusing on lessons learned, what has changed, and the nature of teamwork and leadership in the new corporate environment. She emphasized the importance of reconnecting intelligently in today's market.

She noted that a significant portion of face-to-face communication relies on non-verbal cues, and a large percentage of connections are dynamic, spanning various channels. This is why she started her session by pushing the audience to perform a traditional Bali dance known as "changing the light bulbs and washing the sheets" to foster a stronger human connection before diving into her main points.

Erica highlighted the need for awareness of digital body language at work. Specifically, she encouraged attendees to create fun connections beyond just email or instant messages. She urged them to tap into their

connectional intelligence, a concept that involves maximizing the power of networks, relationships, and technology to unlock value. This is incredibly important as AI becomes more common in workflows and has the potential to change jobs. Part of having connectional intelligence is knowing how to use this tool to automate tasks so professionals can focus time and energy on human connection and strategy. And to help foster a stronger connection, Erica shared the Four Laws of Connectional Intelligence to consider:

Value visibility: Value people's time and inboxes. Clarify meeting success early. Consider asking your team members the following questions: How do you prefer complex versus non-complex information? How do you prefer urgent versus non-urgent info? How do you prefer to connect?

Communicate carefully: Clear writing is the new empathy. Use the right communication channel with maniacal clarity regarding who needs to be involved, deadlines, the specific task, and priority level.

Collaborate confidently: Focus on maximizing expertise and trying new approaches. Search for ways to, in her words, “cut the crap” and leverage technology to automate select tasks.

Trust totally: Trust is built through courageous conversations and encouraging constructive criticism to push everyone to their fullest potential.

Emmitt Smith

Legendary football player Emmitt Smith shared insights on his journey to success in a captivating session that emphasized the importance of dreams, adapting to change, perseverance, teamwork, and continuous learning. Emmitt's story began watching football with his family one afternoon as a child, when he told his parents that he was going to play for the Dallas Cowboys. Shortly thereafter, his parents enrolled him in a local program where he learned how to play quarterback. After some initial coaching, Emmitt came to realize his skill set would be better suited to a running back. This was the first time he learned the importance of adapting to broaden one's skillset. This often comes with fear, as you never know what is on the other side of change, but it is important to learn how to overcome these obstacles.

Throughout his talk, Emmitt shared how football is a metaphor for life. Inevitably, everyone will be knocked down, but what is important is that we learn how to get back up. Emmitt's career in football pushed him to continuously learn long after winning three Super Bowls and retiring from the sport. His drive translated into his experience with “Dancing with the Stars,” where he was thrust into a new environment to learn a new craft, noting even successful individuals must be willing to practice humility in order to reach new heights.

Dorie Clark

Lauren Piekos, Vice President of Business Development for Atlas® World Group, introduced Dorie Clark, a pro known for helping individuals and companies get their best ideas heard in a crowded, noisy world. Her session focused on how to implement learnings from Forum and become better long-term strategic thinkers. Dorie shared that while most leaders agree on the importance of long-term strategic thinking, many report a lack of time for it. Throughout her presentation, she offered eight ways to improve long-term thinking skills in individuals' respective roles:

- **Protect what's most important:** Be offensive about time. Block time on your calendar for strategic thinking and question meeting necessity.
- **Say no to good things:** Be selective about initiatives due to finite resources. Will taking on a project that you are excited about divert your attention and/or resources from another that is a top priority? If so, you may need to say no to the exciting project.
- **Decide what to be bad at:** Consciously choose areas to deprioritize in order to excel in key areas. It is a matter of courage, enabling employees' bandwidth to truly be great.
- **Heads up, heads down:** Balance execution with periods of broader perspective and learning. Taking intentional time away from the day-to-day hustle, whether through a vacation or industry conference, creates space to think more strategically.
- **Balance your portfolio:** Allocate time for both current tasks and future-oriented experimentation. A large part of balancing a portfolio is leaning in and knowing what you're doing well and looking to the future.
- **Strategic patience:** Understand the difference between what can be sped up and what requires time to grow, and persevere through the "deception phase."
- **Rethink failure:** View small failures as opportunities to gather data for future success.
- **Watch for the raindrops:** Learn from others' experiences and anticipate potential challenges and timelines.

Dorie closed out her session with the idea of bonding and bridging within professional networks. Building a strong network involves both bonding capital (connections with similar people) and bridging capital (connections with diverse individuals who offer new perspectives). Bridging capital is particularly valuable for gaining new ideas and shifting to "heads up" mode. While many professionals lean heavily into their bonding capital, they need to invest more in their bridging capital to hear new ideas that could help reach their goals.

LEARNING SESSIONS

From the Driver's Seat: The PVO's Perspective on Moving Forward

Panelists:

- *Eric Hubenet, Imlach Group*
- *Chris Stoskopf, Suddath Moving and Storage*
- *Bill Pranger, Prager Moving and Storage*

Three of Atlas' top Professional Van Operators shared their experiences from the front lines of the relocation industry in two separate sessions. Their insights included everything from the importance of communication and personalization to the challenges of rising costs. They unanimously agreed: First impressions are critical to start a move on the right foot, and that begins before a moving crew arrives at a customer's home. CSRs set expectations, and PVOs arrive on time to meet or exceed those expectations with a positive, organized demeanor.

Eric, Chris, and Bill addressed the rising costs associated with their businesses. Labor, equipment, maintenance, packing materials, fuel, and even less lead time from customers have all impacted the bottom line post-COVID.

Panelists also noted that open, frequent communication is the key to success and helps create a stress-free move. Every move should be as stress-free as possible, regardless of the job size or price tag. This can be as simple as clearly labeling boxes or confirming if "everything goes" includes the passport the customer forgot about in a drawer. Once everyone has arrived at the final destination, proper walk-throughs and offering to assist further ensure customer satisfaction.

The panelists took questions from session attendees on managing labor and helpful tech tools. They also shared their varied paths into the industry and what they enjoy most, such as helping families and seeing the country, as well as some of the lighthearted “horror stories” of unusual items they have moved over the years. To close out the sessions, Eric, Chris, and Bill provided invaluable on-the-ground insights, including which states are costliest to move through – Illinois, California, and Pennsylvania, along with the East Coast due to tolls – and advice for young people to break into the industry, like learning how to load while maintaining a strong work ethic, effective communication, and attention to detail.

3 Hot Topics on Global HR Trends

Team of Experts:

- *Michelle Windhausin, Global Mobility Business Partner, Arcadis*
- *Sarah Beck, Director of Global Mobility and Contingent Workforce, Workday*
- *Liz Wells, HR Manager, Charles Schwab*

Research shows the adult attention span only lasts about 11 minutes. With that in mind, the team of experts structured a buzzer-beater-style session that hit on three hot topics in global HR: AI adoption, immigration policies and relocation, and fostering a sense of belonging.

AI: Companies are exploring and integrating AI into various HR functions, often providing training on different AI tools, although adoption may not always be mandatory initially. AI is being used for administrative tasks, case management, enhancing job roles, and freeing up HR professionals to focus on strategic initiatives. Concerns about the impact on critical thinking are being addressed by using AI as a complement and a tool to challenge thinking. One example highlighted was how some companies are using AI to proactively identify employees who could be impacted by updates to immigration policies and reach out to offer support. This drastically cuts down on the time it would have otherwise taken to manually sift through employee information to determine who these changes could affect.

Immigration updates: Keeping up with the frequent changes in immigration policy is a challenge. Companies rely on past experiences, work closely with legal teams and cross-functional groups to ensure uniform messaging, and partner with immigration providers. Town halls are being used to address employee emotions and uncertainties. Proactive data management is crucial for identifying potentially impacted employees due to policy changes. Some companies are offering lottery system support and focusing on making foreign national employees feel more secure.

Belonging: Senior managers play a crucial role in fostering a culture of belonging. This is often measured through engagement and sentiment surveys. Key elements of a workplace culture that fosters belonging include distinct values, prioritizing employee well-being, and making efforts to be more global. Technology such as Teams, phone calls, surveys, and recognition platforms (like Star Rewards and Send Words) are also being used to foster belonging.

Getting to Yes!

Team of Experts:

- *Lee Frazier, Relocation Coordinator, Mayo Clinic*

- *Dolly Zaharoni, Total Rewards Excellence Vendor & Relationship Management, Abbvie Pharmaceuticals*
- *Desiree Nelson, GMS-T, Global Mobility Specialist, Warner Bros. Discovery*
- *Sandy Beyer, (S)CRP, GMS, Director, Global Talent Mobility, Salesforce*

In this dynamic discussion session, attendees worked together at their tables to brainstorm ways to “get to yes,” or receive stakeholder buy-in, on different topics, such as relocation, supply chain, budgets, and more. After 15 minutes of discussion, attendees came back together to share with the larger group and four relocation management experts. Lee, Dolly, Desiree, and Sandy provided insights on successful programs they implemented at their organizations and gave feedback on the brainstormed ideas.

The key takeaway from every topic was the importance of building relationships. Whether those relationships are with leadership team members so they understand potential new policies or with employees reviewing their options, communication and education are critical. For example, when vetting new RMC partners, a stakeholder may be hesitant to make a change if they have worked with the same partner for many years or decades. In addition to clear data, having a one-on-one relationship with that stakeholder will allow mobility specialists the opportunity to go beyond dollars and cents and get to the human element and the why behind the change.

Industry Insights

Speaker: Rebecca Brewster, President & CEO, American Transportation Research Institute

In this session, Rebecca highlighted the top concerns for both motor carriers and drivers in the latest [ATRI Top Issues Industry Report](#). Top concerns for carriers included the economy, lawsuit abuse reform, insurance costs, driver compensation and shortage, battery electric vehicles, CSA, detention at customer facilities, and driver distraction. For truck drivers, top issues were truck parking, driver compensation and shortage, detention, speed limits, broker issues, ELD mandates, and fuel prices.

[ATRI's Operational Costs 2024 Report](#) was also discussed during this session. This new report found that operational costs have increased significantly since 2019, when the cost to operate per mile was \$1.699. In 2024, the cost per mile increased to \$2.27. Insurance costs are rising and are largely linked to tort abuse. Driver turnover remains high, but is considered a relatively good number for the current industry conditions. The need for more women in trucking was also highlighted, noting their positive driving records. The top reasons why women choose not to pursue a career in this field are largely due to challenges they face on the road, such as safety at rest stops. Key industry challenges include negative image, training completion, and unsatisfactory carrier culture. Renewable diesel was presented as a potentially better short-term solution for emissions reduction compared to battery electric vehicles. Traffic congestion's significant impact on emissions and costs was also discussed.

Speaker: Mercedes Badia-Tavas, Partner, Barnes & Thornburg LLP

For the final industry insights session, Mercedes covered key changes in immigration policy that companies should be aware of when it comes to employees and relocation needs.

She provided the audience with an overview of the current U.S. immigration law (Immigration & Nationality Act of 1964) in her opening remarks, noting that while this remains in place, executive actions have led to numerous changes since 2021. Changes under the new administration may include increased in-person interview requirements at consulates, limits on international travel, and processing delays. She emphasized the need for employers to be aware of potential increases in worksite raids and investigations.

Key steps employers should take to prepare include clarifying immigration function ownership, having clear policies, working with competent providers, and ensuring they have an informed workforce. Maintaining a strong immigration compliance program, including I-9 audits and staff training, is essential. Common problems in this area are a result of a lack of planning and unclear policies.

Mercedes closed her session with the importance of expressing empathy and sensitivity to impacted employees during these uncertain times.