



FEATURE



Creativity and Productivity: Three Bold Moves to Redesign Your Workspace

[By Ted Sottong]

"I don't need you to think; I just need you to work." You don't have to be Dale Carnegie to know that's an old-and bad-approach to management. Employees who think are obviously valuable. But there is an ever-expanding volume of material touting creativity and innovation as traits that are desirable for not only executives and managers but also all employees in the workplace. When all members of the firm think creatively, productivity increases, and morale stays high. Increasingly, all types of firms are realizing that their employees should not only be thinkers but also creative thinkers.

Most office spaces don't reflect the forward-thinking creative executives who lead them. Our workplaces are still old school. Bold steps must be taken if you are serious about having an office that encourages innovation. Don't let your space fight all your progressive management techniques. These three bold moves will bring your space up to date with your creative-worker strategy:

Get Flexible.

Part of creativity is the generation of ideas and building upon those ideas. A free flow of information and the unimpeded ability to see the progress of others may be two of the best and easiest aspects of the creative process to address. Open floor plans allow for easy communication between all employees. By giving employees the ability to choose where in the office they would like to work, you are giving them a little more freedom regarding their immediate surroundings. Most importantly, you are giving them the opportunity to move into teams and to collaborate easily. Develop a system of movable workstations, or give all employees

laptops and let them go where they want in the office.

Open Up Your Break Room.

Opening up the lunch room has great advantages. Employees will be more likely to socialize and share ideas informally due to a higher incidence of spontaneous meetings. Employees will be less likely to "hide out" in the staff break room with a book and more likely to have lunch with people they don't usually talk to. Many might think this arrangement would be disruptive, and it is true that the room will likely become the social hub of the office. However, the disruption will tend to regulate itself; when employees are in the middle of the office, they will know it and regulate their own volume, topics, and time spent socializing for fear of being conspicuous.

Abolish Offices.

This is, of course, all top-down stuff, so who better to be a part of the flexible open floor plan than those at the top? This

has numerous advantages. Senior-level management can overhear problems early and suggest solutions. Of course, those same managers can also be overheard, which is great, because good managers have a lot to teach just by putting their work habits and decision-making processes on display. When you are an integral part of the creativity of the office, opportunities exist to monitor productivity, learn from your employees, learn about your employees, and identify personnel concerns early.

Most executives I have spoken with stated that they could not work without an office, with privacy being the chief concern. By providing a higher number than usual of conference rooms (most of which can be very small four-person rooms), you will always have a place to go for a private conversation or phone call.

Developing creative, flexible, and team-oriented space is an integral part of getting the most out of your employees. While most of your upper-level managers will dislike the idea of giving up their offices, once you



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do it, they will understand the idea and your commitment to it. The example starts with you. Your attitude, reinforced by your physical space, will send a consistent message to the entire company: collaborate and create.

About the Author:

Ted Sottong graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991 with a Master of Architecture and has been practicing architecture for the past 16 years. Currently, he is a partner and vice president at

Architecture, Inc., where he runs the Florida office. Ted is an LEED Accredited Professional and licensed to practice architecture in Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. He has worked extensively in the housing markets, completing award-winning projects for both senior and student housing.

Prior to running the Florida office, Ted held various management positions at prior firms, including CAD manager, project manager, project architect, and director of production.

Ted has developed an innovative work environment designed to foster teamwork and creativity. He believes that empowering employees is both productive and rewarding. His office grew from one employee to 16 in about three years.

Ted is active in Rotary and the local AIA chapter and serves on the Executive Board of the Boy Scouts.

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