

THE NEWS-PRESS

Architecture firm is open to creativity

By: PAM WITMER – PJWITMER@NEWS-PRESS.COM – JUNE 21, 2008

The office style of Architecture, Inc. is truly free wheeling.

Desks, file cabinets, tables as well as chairs are on wheels. There are no walls, just lots of electrical plugs in the floor of a large octagonal space.

Every Friday afternoon all office furniture is put away in the back room.

On Monday mornings, staffers are urged to find a new location in the office and work with someone different.

Ted Sottong, vice president and partner in the national corporation, runs the Fort Myers office in keeping with his philosophy of how to have a creative workspace.

"Bold moves must be taken if you are serious about having an office that encourages innovation," Sottong wrote in an article currently on line for Manager Crossing, a job placement firm for managers.

Sottong encourages an open floor plan for office space, which is exactly the layout of the corporation's site in south Fort Myers.

The other location in Reston, Virginia does not use the same open concept office plan, Sottong said.

"We are the pioneers," he said, for his corporation and in general for architectural offices nationwide.

"We are the only ones that have taken it to the extent of having mobile furniture," he said.

Staffers in the Fort Myers office said they like the arrangement.

One of the newest employees is William Wyatt, who started with the company in January.

"I was a little skeptical of the arrangement at first," Wyatt said. "Actually, I was very skeptical."

Wyatt said he came from an old school military background with more structure.

"It's not the space, it's the company and the way they treat each other that works for me," Wyatt said.

A staff of 17 works in the open space. Wyatt said it's the office culture of mutual respect that makes it work.

Joseph Sherrow, a draftsman who has worked with the company for two years, likes the arrangement.

"When I'm working on a project, I can get the information I need when I need it."

Roman Brown, a business development associate hired in 2008, finds the open arrangement good for business.

"Because there are no walls as barriers, there are no excuses for not communicating with team mates," Brown said.

Mark Shannon, a draftsman, said the setting encourages staff to talk to each other and learn from each other.

Sottong, who is the office manager and inspiration for the open concept, said most potential employees he has interviewed accept the office arrangement.

"One interviewee described it as intimidating because there are no walls to hide behind," Sottong said.

He said when he has clients tour the office space he encourages them to use the concept in their projects.

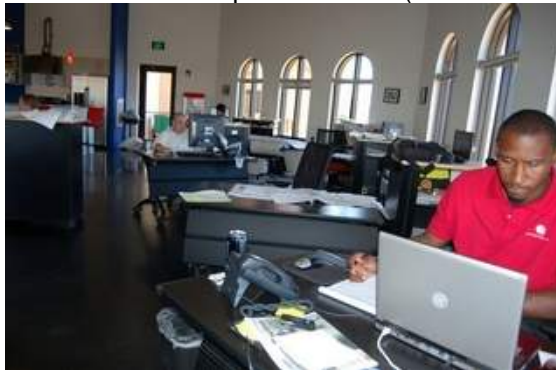
"I'm trying to get people to go for it, but everybody thinks I'm crazy," Sottong said.

Even though clients don't want to have open office space themselves, they appreciate what Sottong is doing, he said.

"It shows we are willing to think a little differently than anyone else," Sottong said. "They like their architect to have creativity."



The open space of Architecture, Inc. allows staff to move desks around in any configuration. There is also a kitchen area for special events. (Pam Witmer/news-press.com)



Roman Brown is a business development associate at Architecture, Inc. He likes to be one of the first in the office on Monday morning so he can choose his spot for his desk for the week. (Pam Witmer/news-press.com)



Desks on wheels allow staff to move around the room, teaming up with people for various projects as needed. (Pam Witmer/news-press.com)

MORE INFORMATION

Architecture, Inc.

9681 Gladiolus Drive, Suite 205 in Fort Myers, FL

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On line at archinc.com

Recent business accomplishment:

Named owner's representative for Cleveland Clinic Florida. The firm is responsible for management of all construction related aspects of Cleveland Clinic's capital improvement plan, offering project management from project inception through close out.

The company has Florida offices in Fort Myers and Orlando as well as Reston, Virginia.

Promoting creativity

Ted Sottong's recommendations for promoting creative thinking in the work place:

1. Get flexible

Open floor plans allow for easy communication between all employees and allow employees to choose where they want to have the work space.

2. Open the break room

Make it part of the overall space to promote spontaneous meetings.

3. Abolish offices

Senior-level management can overhear problems early and suggest solutions. Being in the office provides opportunities to learn from employees too.

Source: "Creativity and Productivity: Three Bold Moves to Redesign Your Workspace" at managercrossing.com