

WALL - TO - WALL WELLNESS

HOW MY ENVIRONMENT INCREASED EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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When most people think about health, specifically the wellness of their workforce, they tend not to think about architecture. It is often overlooked, though it plays an integral role in how you and your staff perform on a daily basis. The truth is, architecture impacts us all—in our homes, our offices and even our community.

As an architect, I am always preaching the great benefits of design and architecture to our clients, especially as they relate to health. I emphasize that architecture can directly impact an employee's productivity. In fact, an employee's workspace can drastically affect his or her well-being, attitude, level of effort, and ultimately, his or her happiness. This impact is not a result of aesthetics alone, but of an entrepreneur's planning strategies.

The message that I give others recently became one that I applied to my own business. I was offered an opportunity to purchase property that I could develop into a new office space for my staff of 26. Before I started conceptualizing, I knew that this new office needed to demonstrate our commitment to good environmental design and thoughtful planning. I also knew we needed to be budget conscious and save money in the short and long term. Here are some of the steps we took to ensure we collaborate to create a healthy and enjoyable work environment:

Placement Perfection

One architectural notion we explored was the philosophy of placement. By positioning key components of our space at particular locations, we could force interaction among people and reduce the sedentary nature of most common office environments. We created five different meeting spaces and spaced them out accordingly. Each space was designed to be visible and open, yet perform to the needs of our business.

Natural Light, Naturally

Another effort was our use of lighting. Numerous studies I've read cite the great value of natural light. Other studies highlight the significant impact of eye strain and fatigue on staff as a result of poor lighting design. To prevent that from occurring, we installed a device described as a "daylight harvesting system." It automatically reads the amount of natural light

coming in from outside and balances the artificial lighting to output a consistent level of light, significantly reducing eye strain. Also, we now provide ambient lighting, as well as individual-controlled task lighting, which lets employees control their lighting to suit their needs. I've noticed that these simple adjustments have yielded better performance by reducing fatigue and strain.

Goodbye Bland

Another step we took was to ensure that the aesthetics of our new environment promoted stability. By utilizing a variety of materials, colors and textures, we were able to create a soothing backdrop that inspired calm and encouraged employees to work more efficiently. We made it a point to blend subtle colors and opted for more soothing fare, such as earth-tone and pale hues. In choosing these colors, I have noticed a direct improvement on the state of mind of my employees.

After applying these steps to our new office, I have noticed that it has greatly impacted employee performance. Not only have we had a significant reduction in employee time off due to illness, but productivity has improved and deadlines seem to be met more easily. What's more, in employee performance reviews, I am consistently told that the work environment is one of the best benefits we offer as a company.

Overall, implementing these three steps has helped me operate my business. It has also given me awareness that the modifications could ultimately promote higher productivity, which in turn, means a better return on our efforts. After seeing the results first hand, I now approach our clients and community with an even greater confidence in the message I deliver. From my experience, the right aesthetics and architectural design of an office create an environment that promotes comfort, stability and overall wellness. ☺



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