MAKE THEIR OFFICE WORKSPACE A PRODUCTIVE PLACE
Creating a comfortable workspace can increase productivity

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Your employees work performance, job satisfaction and productivity could be directly attributed to your ability to create a comfortable environment. While it might seem feasible to equate low performance with internal drive, studies show that the external environment in which employees work is equally significant when it comes to motivation and productivity. In a survey of consultants, researchers, designers, and executives conducted by the American Society of Interior Designers, respondents identified four key factors contributing to enhanced office productivity: access, comfort, privacy, and flexibility. Seemingly, employers willingness and ability to design a workspace offering favorable environmental conditions directly correlates with individual output capacity. What drives a worker to increased results could be as simple as adjusting the temperature in the office to creating aesthetically pleasing surroundings. Not convinced? A Cornell study conducted by Alan Hedge found that when office temperature was increased from 68 degrees to 77 degrees Fahrenheit, typing errors fell by 44 percent and typing output jumped 150 percent. Likewise, visual stimulators such as a view to the outdoors, artwork and color impact office settings and can be used for inspiration.

Couple that with the fact that employees are spending significantly more time working. On average, employed persons spend 7.6 hours at work, compared to 8.6 hours asleep, and 4.3 hours engaged in some leisure activity, according to the American Time Use Survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, making the workplace a consistent and dominant influence. Considering employees spend 86 percent of the time they work in the actual workplace and about 21 percent of that time working from home, the office inevitably becomes a supplementary adjunct of home.

What motivates employees in the workplace?
The argument could be made that the strategies used to recruit employees are the same ones that will keep employees, which reaches far beyond monetary and tangible benefits. In a study entitled, "Recruiting Qualified Employees" commissioned by the American Society of Interior Design the following facts were revealed:

- Employees who were pleased with their physical workplaces were 31 percent more likely to say they were satisfied with their jobs
- The physical workplace would impact 41 percent of employees and job seekers to accept a position
- The quality of their workplace would influence 51 percent to leave a company
- Outside of compensation, comfort and aesthetic appearance of the workplace was second in terms of benefits

Creating a warm, personal environment could be the key to not only finding and recruiting employees, but your next step for building a more satisfied and productive workforce.

Don't Underestimate the Value of Comfort

Comfort Provides Connection
Taking the time to create a comfortable workspace allows employers to deliberately consider the needs and enjoyment of workers, providing an opportunity for employers to connect more directly with employees. A space designed with proper lighting and ventilation, seating and purposely selected colors enrich the job experience for both employee and employer. Employers will find a happier, more contented workforce, which usually leads to decreased absenteeism, increased results, and longevity in the workplace. Employees feel valued and appreciated, more dedicated and committed.

Finding Comfort Solutions
Understanding the need for comfort in and of itself doesn't provide the solution. Employers must carefully determine how they will begin to implement strategies to build a more comfortable environment and consider the various factors involved – location, office space, number of employees, budget, current conditions, and ease of implementation to name a few. Each aspect must be considered separately and thoroughly utilizing work-based assessments and planning tools. After carefully exploring these options, the employer must then begin to look at the personal dynamics of comfort design. In her book, Space Meets Status: Designing Workplace Performance, author Jacqueline Vischer describes three elements of environmental comfort: physical comfort, functional comfort, and psychological comfort and the need for the three to work cohesively to produce performance results. Physical comfort might be the act of ensuring proper seating and desk height while functional comfort would be how well the office and design equips the employee to do the work. Psychological comfort is less measurable and predictable and considers an employee's sense of status, territory, privacy and control.

Where do we start?
Getting started doesn't have to be an arduous task but should be taken on thoughtfully. Employers with complex structures, rapid growth, and relocation issues would benefit from team planning with specific objectives around environmental comfort. However, subtle, simpler changes can be taken on almost immediately by smaller companies and companies in transition.

Think Aesthetically
A window view for each employee might not be a viable option, but there are smaller, more immediate ways to meet the needs of employees. Improving aesthetics can mean anything from changing the lighting to incorporating plants and pictures. Employers can take walk-around checks and conduct short or informal surveys to determine in what ways they can offer more comfortable settings. Flexibility in allowing workers to provide input into wall hangings and color schemes gives workers a feeling of inclusion and is a simple way to create psychological comfort for employees. Smaller offices with fewer employees or larger companies with divisions might create focus groups or develop a team project for improving the workspace.

Improve Furniture
Office workers spend a good bit of time on the phone and in front of their computers. Special emphasis should be put on providing furniture that allows for flexibility and comfort. Adjustable chairs designed to support good neck and back posture are essential for workers spending extended time at their desks. Adjustable workstations that allow for mobility and increased privacy symbolize an environment that is open for change.

Check the Temperature
Workers that are too hot or too cold don't make for comfortable employees and trying to get office consensus on one temperature rarely works. Individual temperature controls should be installed at workstations where and when feasible. Older offices or those with centralized heating and air should be checked to ensure they're working properly, maintained, and regulated for temperature control.

In Conclusion:
When ranked by importance, employees decisively confirm comfort provides satisfaction and motivation in the workplace. Employers wanting the most out of their employees can incorporate strategy along with simple design solutions to incorporate environmental comfort that produces happier, more productive employees.

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By Jacqueline Vischer