



Toronto, 08/14/2013

How to ensure your staff look forward to coming back to work after summer holidays

By Lynn McGregor

Families across our country anticipate the start of school, and start preparing their children with enthusiasm, to ensure they enjoy the experience of the return to classes and learning. But is anyone planning ahead to ensure that the parents also enjoy the experience of the return to their offices?

While on my holiday, I was speaking to a gentleman who dreaded the thought of going back to his office. He shared that his organization was doing yet another change in their office, moving the staff even further into what management had told the staff was “alternative officing”. Their interpretation of this overused phrase was to take away 50% of the already reduced office space and ask more people to work from their homes, at least 3 days of the work week. I asked if they were laying off a lot of staff. They were laying off a few – but certainly not 50%. The biggest change was putting more staff into temporary “hoteling” stations, and removing many of the benefit amenities that the Staff really enjoyed, such as the subsidized cafeteria.

If fewer staff were at the office, the thought was that these types of support spaces would not be required. And one assumes that would be a fair assumption. But how sad. Removal of your work space, of your privacy, of Lunch. What’s left to look forward to? How much more can they take away? And this man is not alone in his thoughts.

Most workers want to be kept busy. They like to contribute ideas for office improvement, and cost reduction. They want to enjoy their work and feel proud of their contribution. But when a change of this nature is thrust upon them, with no participation from the Staff, it can be seen by many as disrespectful and dismissive of their value and importance. This staff member is having a very normal and typical reaction to this type of abrupt, imposed office change.

How could they have done a better job, and ensure that this gentleman (and all his co-workers) really enjoy their work each day, while achieving the mandated cost reductions?

How can you know if your process for Office Change will be a Successful One?

1. Share with the Staff the objective of the proposed changes, (i.e.: cost reductions in this case), and let them know that they are valued and will be asked to participate to ensure that the results of the exercise are a success. Remind them that they all live in a democracy, so it



might be that not all ideas can be implemented – but all ideas will be welcomed and will be given consideration.

2. Then really involve the Staff, in discussions regarding their functional needs, their observations regarding what works well in the current offices – and what could be improved. Again, welcome ideas and show them respect.
3. Do your homework before concluding how to achieve your office objectives. Before implementing an approach, speak to office design experts regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the various ways you could approach your objective. For example: Office Planning experts know that this type of dramatic office compression, and the intense hoteling approach is most often not successful, and leads to very expensive corrective measures. Organizations looking to reduce operational costs, can't afford to make these types of mistakes. So do your homework, and present options to your organization with an impact report for each. Ask the design experts for their experiences. Has it worked for others? Are there any past clients, who have gone through something similar, that you could speak with? Could you chat with organizations that had problems, to ensure you don't repeat them?
4. Recognize that your office space can either reinforce your brand message or it can destroy it. Your office space sends a message to all who experience it, from current staff to new talent you want to recruit, to shareholders, investors and business partners. Control that Message. For example: Reductions can be done that make an organization look even more leading edge and successful. It shouldn't be a message of desperation.
5. Ensure you are working with a qualified Designer who has a good track record, and has experience with the challenge that you face. Take the time to check references, and ensure that they have a reputation for delivering on commitments. Working with the wrong consultant can also add cost to any project.
6. In this economy, no organization can afford to destroy their Staff's loyalty or commitment to helping their employer succeed. Recognize this before any communication with your Staff, and before you plan your approach.

Ensure that your Staff's Happiness is not be ignored

When reviewing your office space and your organization's objectives, remember that the need to keep employees satisfied should not be ignored. The following are researched Staff "Satisfaction Issues" in order of importance (Herman Miller, 2002):



1. Ability to do distraction-free solo work,
2. Support of impromptu interaction anywhere,
3. Support for Meetings and undistracted group work,
4. Workspace Comfort and enough space for work tools,
5. Workspace arrangement that supports side by side work,
6. Location near or within easy access to co-workers,
7. Good Place for Breaks,
8. Easy access to technology and shared equipment,
9. Quality Lighting and Access to Daylight,
10. Temperature Control and Air Quality.

As noted above, an office space, to be successful, should provide the appropriate support to all levels of staff, including appropriate privacy for specific functions, functional equipment located conveniently, physical adjacency to other staff that need to interface together, etc. It should also provide for the basic physical needs: good light, fresh air and temperature controls.

But to be a really successful office, it should also help inspire the staff, promote productivity and creativity. It should make staff proud to be a part of the organization, and make them want to help their employer succeed. And it should make them happy to come to work each day, where they know they are shown respect and appreciation for their contribution. Life is just too short.

=====
About Lynn McGregor

Lynn McGregor is a past President of ARIDO (the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario), Co-Chair of their Legislative Review Committee and elected representative of the Province registered Interior Designers, on Ontario's Building Advisory Council. She has practiced in the area of Corporate Architectural Interior Design for over 34 years, and is the Owner of the McGregor Design Group, headquartered in Toronto. More information: www.mcgregordesigngroup.com