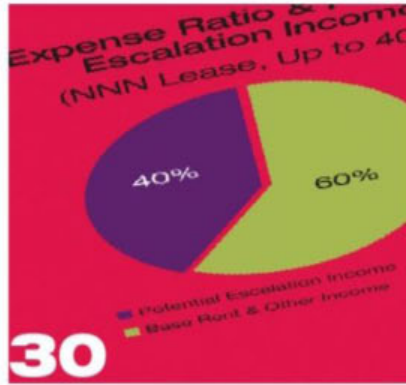


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CREATING A BETTER Workplace



Mars Drinks global headquarters in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

BY JESSICA BATES

Just as building owners and managers continually strive to keep their tenants satisfied, tenants themselves constantly are looking for innovative ways to foster employee satisfaction while increasing productivity. More and more companies are finding that the physical spaces in which their employees work can have a dramatic effect on everything from their creativity to their health.

“It is a travesty how often people don’t feel happy or have a sense of well-being at work,” says Tracy Brower, PhD, author of *Bring Work to Life by Bringing Life to Work* and the director of Human Dynamics of Work for office furniture supplier Herman Miller. “When companies support and engage employees, these companies see more employee productivity, higher employee retention rates and a whole host of other benefits.” Design experts have begun exploring how our surroundings can affect our behavior, and office spaces are no exception. According to Brower, companies can reap dramatic results by creating office layouts that encourage innovation and engagement.

One such company is Mars Drinks, a segment of Mars, Incorporated, that offers coffee and other hot beverage solutions to workplaces worldwide. Recently, the Mars Drinks global headquarters in West Chester, Pennsylvania, were redesigned with the help of Herman Miller to inspire happier and more productive employees. The new space includes a variety of work areas to meet different employee needs. Much of the office space has been kept open to promote communication between workers, but

when employees need time for quiet work or private conversations, special “huddle rooms” are available. Dynamic coffee lounges and so-called “social kitchens” have been designed to allow coworkers and company leaders alike to recharge and converse. By creating inviting break areas, Mars Drinks encourages its employees to stay on-site for coffee breaks and lunch, thereby creating more opportunities for collaboration and connection.

Frank LaRusso, vice president of Business Development for Mars Drinks, says the decision to focus on company culture was a simple

one. “When companies look at the value of employee health and well-being, they should be inspired to do something.” As our society becomes increasingly aware of the negative impacts that poor office culture and even sitting for long periods of time can have on our health, LaRusso believes it is important for employers to take proactive measures to mitigate these effects. “An office space should be highly energetic and highly inspirational, helping companies create more innovation, better health and greater happiness for their employees.”

However, companies need not knock down every wall and construct entirely open office spaces in order to create what Herman Miller terms a “Living Office”—a workplace that continuously evolves for greater prosperity. In fact, Brower points out that some companies have over-compensated, creating more open spaces and collaboration at the expense of privacy and contemplative time. The most successful workplaces accommodate a variety of work activities and characters, a concept reflected in the redesigned offices of Mars Drinks. “No matter our style, work preferences or job function, there will be times when we need to connect with others and there will be times when we need to work in a more solitary space. The key is for companies to provide options,” Brower explains.

Both Brower and LaRusso believe that well-designed offices will become more prevalent as the benefits become better known. As pioneering employers realize increasing economic benefits from happier and healthier employees, others will follow similar workplace strategies.

But the best employers will always see room for improvement. “Companies should be continuously striving to improve office spaces, rather than just modernizing once every 10 or 20 years and wiping their brow,” says Brower. “Work and workers are always changing, so companies should always be listening to what employees need.”

Brower’s advice for companies looking to improve their space? “Start by identifying the purpose that your organization is trying to fulfill, then really look at the work activities that need to be supported,” says Brower. “Finally, think about the settings that will best encourage these activities and create workplace landscapes accordingly.” Building owners and managers also should keep this advice in mind as they continue to look for ways to attract and retain tenants. As seasoned property professionals know, an office space truly isn’t just a place to work. ■

