

How Entrepreneurs Can Create a More Inclusive Office Space

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When discussing inclusive workspaces, we often refer to inclusivity from a cultural perspective. For instance, we might talk about activities that promote diversity, or we brainstorm DEI-focused hiring techniques. However, what's sometimes missing from the whole "inclusive office" conversation is how the actual office space (e.g., the building, the floor) is designed.

The layout of a workplace can strongly affect whether or not the space feels welcoming and inviting to everyone. Consider someone who uses a wheelchair. Even if all the ADA standards are met, such as wide doorways and accessible bathroom appliances, the space may not foster much of a connection if other needs haven't been considered – like whether or not the flooring is wheelchair-friendly.

Does it take extra planning and resources to make sure your office is comprehensively inclusive, right down to its design? Without a doubt. However, going the extra mile shows that you're an empathetic leader who wants to be at the helm of a genuinely future-forward organization. And that's good for business. Almost eight out of 10 employees say they want to work for an employer who cares about inclusivity, according to a survey by CNBC.

Consider adopting a few best practices to transform your office spaces for maximum inclusivity. They'll help you encourage collaboration and unity, as well as create a business environment where every employee, customer and

visitor feels valued, empowered and seen.

Related: Top Trends to Influence Office Space Designs in 2024

1. Establish areas that are fun and relaxing

Many people think of businesses as having corporate, staid overtones. Now is a good time to buck this trend by establishing zones meant for enjoyment. For example, you might want to set aside a tech room for gamers. They can take a quick break to indulge in a favorite hobby – and maybe meet others who share their pastimes.

If you have employees or guests who visit with young family members, consider investing in commercial playground equipment. Be sure to install high-quality, accessible swings, sensory-rich activity stations, and other inclusive elements as part of a “green play” area. As the AAA State of Play explains, acquiring accessible playground equipment shows that you’ve put thought behind your efforts to start the seeds of an inclusive “we’re all in this together” community. You’ll go a long way toward showing parents and grandparents that you support them.

2. Revamp your layout to reflect your DEI mission

Consider measuring your DEI mission statement and inclusivity beliefs against your workplace design. If you spot any mismatches, take action to harmonize your values and your space layouts.

For example, your company might be built on the concept of not having a “corporate ladder” mentality. What if your design layout includes lots of executive “corner offices”?

In that case, M Moser Associates notes that you might unintentionally be encouraging a sense of inherent inequality between workers based on their titles. Though this might seem relatively unimportant, it could be an invisible stressor or roadblock to your vision of an inclusive office.

Related: [How to Transform Your Office Into a Collaboration Destination](#)

3. Diversify your decorations

From wall hangings to artwork, your office decor can make people feel at ease or uncomfortable. Ideally, you want the decorations you choose to be aligned with your overarching design. At the same time, you may want to swap out dated pictures or similar objects with those that celebrate the backgrounds of everyone in your office.

Put a premium on the concept of representation when you're revisiting your office decor. Make sure you're not simply catering your decorations' visual appeal toward individuals from a single walk of life or background (e.g., having all people from one type of family or one culture depicted in every photo.) You may even want to ask your employees for their input. They probably have some thoughts for decorations that you never imagined but could freshen up your office space's art-related diversity.

4. Design for neurodivergent audiences

Every person thinks in a unique way. Yet most businesses aren't set up to be accessible for those who might be considered neurodivergent due to autism or ADHD. Being sensitive to neurodivergence may mean constructing spaces that look or feel different to you but put others at ease.

Unsure how to get started? Haiken recommends some suitable spaces and experiences for neurodivergent populations, such as meditation rooms and locations that echo the shapes of the natural world. These spots may become beacons for talented professionals who find it challenging to be productive in standard office settings.

Related: 5 Steps to Building a Supportive and Inclusive Workplace for Neurodiverse Employees

5. Let employees choose their office furnishings

Do all your employees sit at the same types of desks? Do they have identical chairs? The same desktop device arrangement? You may be missing a chance for a major inclusivity transformation. After all, each person you hire is an individual.

You may be able to find an office supplier that offers a few different desks, chairs, etc., all within your preferred price range. Consequently, you could enable workers to design their working areas so they feel most at home.

When inclusivity is your ultimate goal, look beyond what your team does or says. The physical arrangement of your workplace can play a major role in how diverse your environment seems to others, too.

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