

These 5 Simple Tweaks Will Make Your Office More Productive

Rethink everything from how you schedule conference rooms to temperature control.

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A Note From The Editor

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Thanks to the rise of mobility tools like Slack, Google Hangouts and the newly announced Facebook Workplace, fewer and fewer workers rely on an office to get work done every day. As a result, nearly 37 percent of the workforce elects to work remotely at least part of the time. And those that do, say they are not only happier, they are more productive.

Still, not all companies embrace a flexible work from home policy. Marissa Mayer of Yahoo famously rolled back the company's telecommuting allowance in 2013, citing that employees are more collaborative and innovative when working in proximity. Despite taking quite a bit of flack for the decision, Yahoo claimed it worked.

For companies committed to fostering both creativity and

productivity in their office environment, leaders and office managers are faced with a challenge: how do you design an office where employees feel just as – if not more – productive as they do at home?

Optimizing your office layout and culture is a great place to start. These simple modifications can boost office productivity in most offices – and can be set in place right away.

1. Carve out spaces that work for everyone.

When it comes to designing an office layout, one size rarely fits all. According to a study by Steelcase, 88 percent of employees will choose where to work in the office based on their task. Limiting employees to working only in an open office floor plan or only in a private, cubicle style floorplan can squash productivity and lead to less overall happiness.

The solve for this isn't to toss out the open office concept altogether, nor ditch every last cubicle. Rather, you can create task-specific workspaces within the office, designed for different workstyles. For example, the kitchen area will always be a magnet for discussion and collaboration. Rather than leaving this collaboration up to chance, encourage it by adding some bar-height tables and stools where employees can mingle.

For more heads down work like coding or examining spreadsheets, do your best to create spaces for quiet focus. If you've got the resources available, consider converting an extra conference room into a silent workspace. You don't need a big budget or major office updates to implement these changes – start by communicating the new office functions to your team and back it up with some signage.

Related: Can't Concentrate in Your Open Office? Try These 3 Things.

2. Make breaks a priority.

You're probably thinking, "Yeah yeah yeah I KNOW it's important to take breaks, but that doesn't mean I have the time." It's true, taking a break can seem completely antithetical to tackling an endless to-do list, but if productivity is the goal, then breaks are essential.

Studies show that we should be breaking once every hour at least. And while that might not be realistic for everyone, it's important to keep in mind that after much more than an hour of focus, our brains simply cannot continue to treat the task at hand as important, meaning work quality goes down.

As a business leader, it's your job to make sure your team knows it's not only acceptable to break from work from time to time, but expected. At TheSquareFoot, we make taking breaks from the grind a routine by holding in-office meditation sessions. Making it a group activity means we completely remove the stigma of stepping away from your desk. The stigma goes the other way now. If someone misses too many meditation sessions, we start to wonder if they're struggling with prioritization.

Related: The Secret to Increased Productivity: Taking Time Off

3. Implement a conference room scheduling system...and stick to it.

We've all experienced what I like to call, the "conference room shuffle" at some point or another. Your Skype call goes over by five minutes, the next group is chomping at the bit trying to get into the room for their meeting, awkwardness ensues. The matter gets even worse when the next team is

delayed further by trying to figure out how to display their project on the big screen. There are tools like YARooms designed specifically for keeping the conference room shuffle organized, but if your team is ignoring these systems, it might be time for an intervention.

Consider drafting a conference room protocol sheet for every meeting room in your office. This should lay out exact rules for scheduling and passing off conference rooms, as well as how to utilize and leave the room itself once a meeting is finished. The benefits of codifying a system are two-fold:

1. There will be less indecision when it comes to passing off conference rooms and those who need to kick out the previous occupant will feel less awkward.
2. Meetings will start more efficiently if there's one easy place to find information such as how to connect to the tv and how to dial out for conference calls.

While these tweaks might sound small, investing some time in organization up-front can pay out massively in the long-run.

Related: 12 Surprising Office Wi-Fi Killers

4. Optimize the office climate for comfort.

Although you'll likely never please everyone, making small tweaks to the environment of your office can have dramatic effects on productivity. Making sure the temperature, light, sound and yes, even smell of your office are tailored to suit the greatest number of people is an easy way to make work feel less like work for your team.

Let's break it down:

Temperature: Most experts agree that the optimal temperature

for workplace productivity is between 70 and 73 degrees. Fans, space heaters and blankets can be supplemented for outliers.

Light: Sunlight can dramatically improve workers' health and productivity. It is one of the most in-demand amenities tenants look for, yet too much light is a problem when it adds a glare to computer screens. Finding the right amount of light has been a problem plaguing the office world for years. Companies 3M and Alcoa are on a mission to redirect plentiful office light. For offices that are just too dark, look into installing some LED lights which mimic the effects of sunlight on the body.

Sound: You'll probably never find a playlist to suit everyone's taste, but studies have found compelling data to support that music helps us work faster and more efficiently by creating a more positive affect, so it may be worth it to keep the tunes going.

Smell: Aromatherapy enthusiasts have been saying this for years: smell can have a dramatic effect on our moods and energy levels, so, why not harness that knowledge to make your workspace more productive? Entrepreneur has a guide on the smells most likely to liven up your workplace.

Related: Make Your Office the One Comfort Zone You Don't Need to Get Out Of

5. Think outside the conference room.

Did you know that employees who take meetings on the go are 8.5 percent more likely to be engaged at work than those that don't? Walking meetings or "walk and talks" have become so popular amongst silicon valley tech companies, that Facebook has a gravel path on their campus designed for that exact purpose.

Yet despite the trendiness and numerous health benefits of getting out of the office from time to time, most employees still spend way too much time planted in front of their computers. This may be because though many businesses are switching to a “results only work environment” in recent years, some still prefer facetime to flexibility. So, rather than simply encouraging team members to get out of the office for meetings and private conversations, lead by example. Executive leadership should take team members on walks instead of just booking a room. Often, these trends are implemented best when embraced from the top down.

Small updates to your workplace’s systems and environment can go a long way in boosting employee satisfaction and productivity. Taking these steps will ensure your team has a haven of productivity to come to each day.

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