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Key traits of successful office space to meet employee needs

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Google's Mountain View, Calif., campus offers all the amenities one might expect: gourmet cafeterias, plenty of open areas and workspaces meant to inspire creativity.

What you may not know about are its swimming pools, extensive day-care facilities, on-site laundry services and even a replica of SpaceShipOne.

Similarly, Facebook's corridors are covered in chalkboards, murals and vending machines that offer computer cables rather than snacks. Now the company is taking its headquarters one step further, hiring legendary architect Frank Gehry to give its space a complete overhaul.

Office space just isn't what it used to be.

Why this change? Much of it can be attributed to the work climate. In many companies, the traditional 9-to-5 workday and cubicle culture have been replaced by open schedules and open floor plans.

As the economy rebounds and companies regain their bearings, employers are finding it's more important than ever to attract and retain a qualified workforce.

What's more appealing than a dynamic office environment?

As work and life intersect, employers are adjusting to better accommodate employees' needs and to position themselves to attract the best and brightest talent.

While people look to either create additional office space or relocate, it's essential to consider the attributes most attractive to current and future employees. Among the most important are location, quality of life and accessibility, helping to ensure a productive and happy workforce.

There's healthy competition for skilled personnel, and from a quality-of-life perspective, business location and its surroundings can be as important as the compensation package.

Companies must contemplate how they integrate into the greater community and what's readily available for their employees. Proximity to parks, fitness facilities, restaurants and coffee shops, shopping and, of course, a powerful Wi-Fi connection are all key factors.

Even better are those features within walking distance, where work breaks can be spent recharging or reconnecting with co-workers. Ideally, the outside environment should be just as stimulating as the inside.

We know a long commute isn't a good way to start or end the day. Studying traffic patterns should be a priority, ensuring an office location is within a reasonable distance of the majority of the labor force.

In fact, many businesses moved to city suburbs in the past few decades. At that time, these companies benefited greatly from an abundance of inventory and cost-effective rates. Today's workers, however, generally prefer to move away from the fringe and isolated office park settings.

The origins of this trend can be traced to both coasts, where small spaces and an urban environment created this movement out of necessity. Now as the trend moves inward, urban settings are back in the spotlight as employers try to find locations that maximize space and fulfill a laundry list of amenities.

Proximity to a qualified labor pool is another major component to review. Many companies, especially startups or those in technology or engineering sectors, find being located near college campuses to be beneficial, as they're exposed to younger talent eager for a job.

Quality of life should be considered both inside and outside of the office by locating near residential areas. Select a region with a variety of options for all employees — from the janitor and admin, who may need more affordable options — to something appealing for company executives. Communities that combine apartment living with single-family homes are the ideal.

Similarly, easy accessibility via proximity to main highway arteries, bike paths and major commuter rail lines is significant. Amplify productivity by reducing drive times while making the commute to work more enjoyable.

In addition, assess growth and expansion needs. Those who anticipate increasing staff numbers or operational needs may want to reserve land for five or 10 years later for development.

In the past, many workers had just a handful of jobs before retiring. Today's young professional is more apt to bounce from one to the next, with career changes in between.

One way to help retain the best team is to create an environment where employees can be productive and happy. Get creative in the amenities you offer. Remember to consider the design, color choices and alternative workspaces, such as the outdoors, to maximize space and encourage collaboration.

Traditionally, from the viewpoint of the decision-making team, cost, applicable incentives and a qualified labor pool nearby used to be the only attributes to keep in mind while looking for space. Now, more than ever, it's important to provide an attractive and healthy work environment that lends itself to productivity and an appealing lifestyle.

It should promote the health and well-being of workers, improve efficiency and the bottom line. It's possible to find the best of all worlds, and the Denver area has many options.

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