

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



143 Time to Hit the Office Layout Reset Button?

Does our office layout have anything to do with how we feel at work, and our overall productivity? I'm Jerry Roberts and today let's grab a look at the physical conditions we're working in, on The Extra Point.

Five years ago Fast Company magazine came out with an article that questioned the benefits of the open office environment. That's the one that saw a lot of companies get rid of their cubicles and set up desks and tables in an open room. Workers were told that the lack of privacy, plus hearing everybody else's phone conversations, plus seeing them and sometimes smelling them eat at their desk — was somehow good for us.

That it would boost organizational productivity, as we shared ideas freely all day long.

And, of course, we could get by with less space, less expense, and that would be a nice bonus. Well, the idea went viral and open office layouts became a trend. There's a number of them here in Guam.

Guess what? Now there's a growing body of research that shows the open environment actually isn't so good for us. We enjoy and, indeed, need privacy. We need to have some protection from interruptions. Cubes aren't the perfect answer. The University of California at Irvine reported that workers in cubicles suffer interruptions at a rate of 29% more than those in private offices. There are times when workers need a quiet and controlled space in order to better concentrate.

So is it back to cubes for everyone? Well, the jury is still out on that one, but it's got a major supporter, Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, one of the world's leading shoe and clothing retailers. Hsieh works in a cube and he gets a lot of media coverage, so it's possible that cubicles will receive some love in the weeks and months to come.

But can we improve our office layout without resorting to cubicles? The answer is yes, and there's some science that encourages people to change the decor every once in a while.

When's the last time you moved things around in your office? Or, is everything in the exact same place as when you first put it there? Yes? Oh, you like it that way? How long has it been *that way*? Years?

People who study such things say that the simple act of shifting office furniture around can stimulate production. Not just that, but it can usher in an increased sense of well being. It's like hitting the environmental reset button.

Are you not sure how to approach this? Find out if there's someone on your staff who has a flair for setting up rooms and let them take a crack at it. What do you have to lose?

Turn it into an after-hours office party, where everybody pitches in. Add food and you're good to go.

You don't have to necessarily spend a lot of money on this. Maybe you don't spend anything. That said, if you can scrounge a few dollars to add plants and some accent lighting, you might end up with something very interesting.

Give it a try. Freshen up the office and see if that helps freshen up attitudes as well.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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