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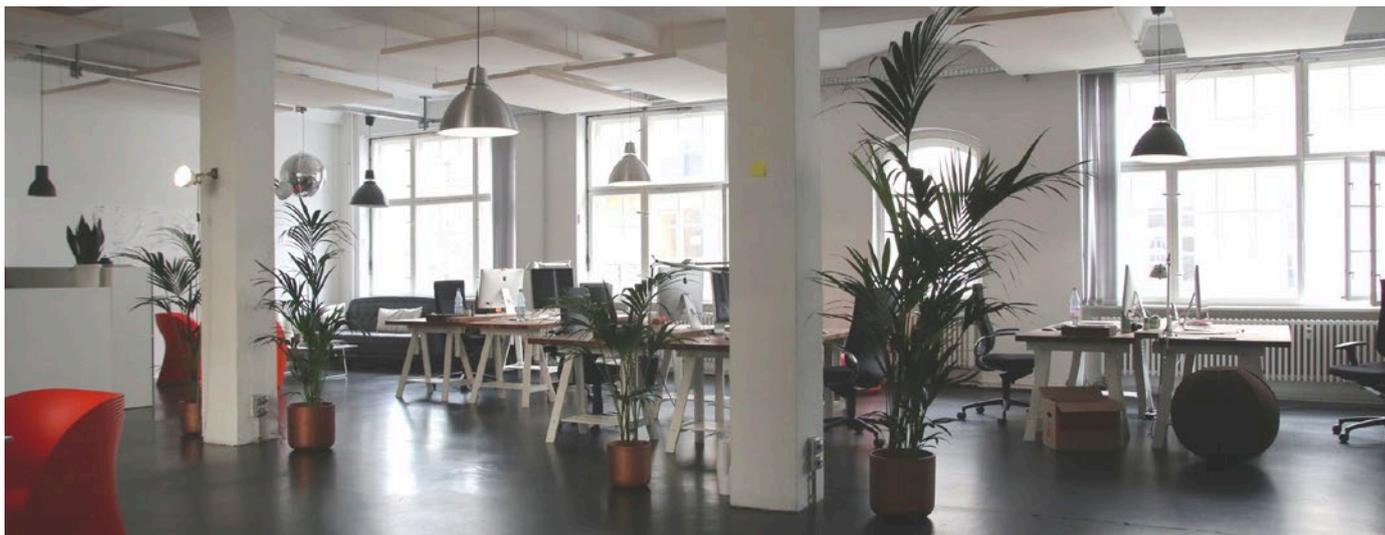
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Connecting & informing business people

DESIGN SHOULD BE YOUR WORKPLACE WINGMAN



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Unashamedly I love a good self-help book. Management books too. More specifically audiobooks that accompany me on my otherwise coma-inducing Newcastle to Sydney commutes.

I'll listen to self-help books to diagnose myself, and recognise qualities in others like responsibility, focus, self-discipline, integrity, honesty and amiability, which can come in handy during the hiring process.

Management books on the other hand help me diagnose my organisation and provide insight into concepts like standardisation, efficiency, effectiveness, leadership, profit and communication.

Whether you are familiar with these types of books or not, imagine for a moment that you have all the tools necessary to build the perfect business culture and all the resources to seek out those 5-percenters employees of excellence. Coupled with your superior leadership skills, would that be everything you need to maximise your likelihood of success?

Certainly, it is a very strong position to grow a business. But there is a powerful concept that the Association of Self-Help and Business Gurus often miss; the influence of the physical environment.

Although the design of your work environment sounds like a small cog in the machine of your operation, it is a far-reaching, highly significant concept of which the contribution to the success of your business should not be underestimated.

Suppose for a moment that you have just brought home your new German shepherd puppy (which is much more intelligent than the neighbour's new Basset hound). You bring the puppy home and inform her she is not to chew on your sofa. However, without setting her up with food, chew toys and perhaps some stimulation with a radio, you are certain to be poop-scooping pieces of hand-stitched Italian leather off your rear lawn.

Now, presumably your employees and colleagues will have the self-control to refrain from chewing the furniture. And if you run an effective business, they most-likely have admirable qualities and are aware of the culture, systems and expectations you have. But there is an opportunity to set up an environment that subconsciously encourages and nurtures desired

behaviours that will allow you to leverage the assets you already have in your people and operation.

For example:

- If technical, repetitive work is what is required, computer screens that face towards the centre of the room, visible clocks, a warm colour palette, and a clean and tidy environment will better foster short bursts of work fuelled by a productive, healthy anxiety;
- Managers who need to undertake a lot of problem-solving may be better suited to an empty office with natural finishes, plants, a "thinking" chair and music playing;
- If your business needs better communication, then perhaps an open-plan office is best;
- If teamwork is important then batching the departments in working groups is likely to be the most beneficial;
- Alternatively, if communication between departments is necessary, create an environment that is conducive to hot-desking so that you may mix the team up each week.

These are all very broad, over-simplified examples, but a designer or architect with a sound business background will be able to effectively translate corporate goals into an environment that cultivates, supports and encourages the team, culture and operations you have created.

Whilst good business procedure, culture and people are essential to your success, you can easily raise the value of these assets by having them fostered, supported and nurtured by the physical environment. Often art & design are not perceived as "serious" enough to sit at the table with management and business but I am here to encourage you that design should really be your workplace wingman.

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Ken Slamet is lead designer and director of The Rubix Collective, a residential and commercial design practice based in Newcastle & Sydney. He is a proud father & husband, his poison of choice is rum and he is controversially a Manly Sea Eagles supporter.