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EXPERT ADVICE

10 QUESTIONS

FOR YOUR YOUR OFFICE DESIGNER

Beautiful offices do more than make a statement about your brand: They increase employee morale and productivity. Here's what to ask your office designer to ensure that your workspace inspires your staff and boosts your bottom line.



1 How much do you know about my business? Sit down with your designer for a "vision session," says Lauren Rottet of Rottet Studio, a national architecture and design firm based in New York. Your designer needs to know your business goals in order to craft a space that will help you achieve them.

2 What kind of design will best increase productivity? Design for function and not necessarily for hierarchy, Rottet says. The space should reflect the workflow process and increase communication and organization. Desks need to function as efficiently as a Swiss Army knife so people don't feel disorganized all day, says Johnson Chou, an interior designer in Toronto.

3 How will you motivate employees? Endless studies have established that natural light stimulates the mind. If you can't put everyone near a window, lower your cubicle walls and make most office doors glass so even the employees farthest away from the windows have a glimpse of the sun and trees, says San Francisco and Los Angeles-based designer Jay Jeffers.

4 What colors are best for my work environment? Warm colors such as tan, beige and gray are generally comfortable and welcoming. Brighter colors, applied carefully, can stimulate employees to become more engaged. "What you don't want is a space that appears static with reverberating fluorescent lights," says Chou.

5 Is a break room or kitchen really necessary? These often neglected spaces are just as important as the conference rooms. "When people are sitting in the same spot for eight hours a day, they are going to lose their minds," says Chou. Including a homey kitchen and break room in the office will loosen up the atmosphere and make employees more productive in the long run.

6 How far in advance do we need to plan an office redesign? Spaces can be completed in anywhere from eight to 18 months, but a year in advance is recommended.

7 Do I need to hire a contractor? You will need to hire a contractor, but the design firm you're working

with should be able to offer recommendations.

8 What kind of contracts will I sign? The contract will spell out everything the designer and contractor agreed to do for the budget. The standard contract should be an American Institute of Architects contract or the design firm's own modified version.

9 How much will an office design cost? Price will vary depending on size, soundproofing, furniture, art, wiring and so on. The most basic office design costs \$40 per square foot; the average is about \$80 to \$100 per square foot. High-end design can easily hit \$200 per square foot.

10 Can I redesign my office with employees still in it? Designers can move all employees to one side of the office, construct hall, and then switch sides, or construct row by row. But it's better to move all the employees to another floor or site for the process if possible. "No one will want to come to work if it's uncomfortable," says Jeffers. **E**

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