



**BREAKING THE MOLD**

If you walked in to a typical office building 10 years ago you would most likely have seen perimeter offices surrounding a sea of cubicles. Today there are a number of successful companies who have broken this mold.

Companies are changing in response to the needs and wants of their employees who no longer see achieving the corner office as the epitome of success.

This change is largely being led by Generation Y, Gen Y or the Millennials. This demographic is largely defined as individuals with birth years ranging from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s. To Gen Y, working in a cool building, with cool amenities, in a comfortable and energetic environment is a stronger motivating factor than a corner office. In fact, many young employees rank a great workspace as more important than a higher pay rate. Some of the amenities they value include basketball courts, rock climbing walls and dedicated game rooms for ping-pong and pool, big screen TVs and game consoles.

Businesses that have been more traditional are making shifts in management style and techniques, adopting new ideas to meet the needs of their younger employees. Collaboration is the name of the game for up-and-coming young entrepreneurs and executives. The cooperative teamwork effort mentality is beginning to permeate how more traditional businesses are run and grown. This change in attitude is being reflected not only in the way a company is run, but also where a company chooses to do business.

As architecture evolves to meet this perspective, companies with multi-generational workforces are often left scratching their heads on how to meet the changing needs of their workforce and business. The current trend is to center on environmental elements. Businesses are creating smaller, more efficient work spaces and offsetting these smaller spaces with shared collaborative areas.

With offices getting smaller, one resulting challenge is parking. Whether a company has 10 or 1,000 employees, parking ratio is a critical consideration for real estate decisions. As the economy continues to grow and employee count goes up, a side effect will be that there are fewer parking spaces available, which increases the importance of nearby mass transit. Many mid to larger cities across the country have pushed hard to build better mass transit and those that have been successful have seen new life in their downtown and core areas. These areas provide a much higher level of amenities



from shopping to restaurants to yoga studios. This live-work-play setting is especially desirable to the Gen Y group.

Large windows, natural light and large collaboration spaces have replaced big signs and cubicle farms. Cubicles still exist but are more commonly located on the exterior of the office which allows for an open space in the middle. The open feel of a space is often extended to the ceiling as well—panels are being ripped out to expose the rafters and ventilation system. This has a tendency to create an atmosphere of volume and an industrious (not necessarily industrial) feeling. Add a few bean bag chairs, a comfy couch, and espresso machine, and the best-places-to-work vibe skyrockets.

Building owners are clueing in to the fact that amenities are important. They are getting creative in what they can offer smaller tenants who may not have the capital to install a private squash court or other feature. Some buildings are providing amenities such as on-site gyms, locker rooms and restaurants for multiple tenants to share.

As the workforce evolves and priorities change, the architecture and design of office space will continue to change as well. Smart executives can start taking cues from cutting edge companies as to what the changing needs of their workforce will entail.