

Q How can we change our work space to generate better performance?

A Create areas that encourage creativity, interaction and a sense of well-being.

LAST SUMMER, we sat in the choir stalls at Westminster Abbey — the 700-year-old English church — and listened to choir voices echo and then fade into the abbey's ancient spaces. My normally fidgety son was glued to his seat, in complete awe. The summer before, we all stood at the base of Yosemite Falls and felt the spray on our faces as we looked skyward through the oncoming drops. Collectively, we took a deep breath.

There was something magical about both those experiences. They put us into what I might call "the zone" or a "state of flow." And as we all know, being "in the flow" encourages creativity, communication and problem solving.

Corporate environments also have a dramatic effect on the way we think and behave. John Medina, in "Brain Rules," says our typical office environment discourages higher brain functions. Sitting for hours in confined spaces under unnatural light dulls our mental processes. Such spaces promote stagnation, not flow.

Instead of process work, there is a growing emphasis on "knowledge work," which depends less on formula and process and more on learning, collaboration, initiative and exploration. So, if we value creativity, trust, innovation and open communication, we need to create office spaces that activate higher brain functions that, in turn, promote desirable behaviors.

Work spaces may never feel like Yosemite or an ancient church, but they can and should encourage the things that are necessary for succeeding in today's global market. ■



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Here are some ideas

COLOR // Paint walls the right shade to stimulate these behaviors — yellow (confidence and energy), green (relaxation and openness), blue (harmony and creativity).

LIGHTING // Use full-spectrum and natural lighting.

BREAK DOWN WALLS // Open work spaces to allow for movement and discussion. Truly effective spaces encourage chance

encounters. They invite people to move around, start unexpected conversations and collaborate spontaneously. Open spaces generate the sorts of fortunate accidents that lead to new perspectives on vexing problems.

UNSTRUCTURED WORK AND BREAK SPACE // Provide areas that give employees the freedom to work how, when and where they want. Place a few comfortable chairs in unusual spots — in corners of large rooms, hallways,

in front of large windows. Knowing that creativity arrives at all hours, these spaces and amenities should be accessible around the clock.

IDEA WALLS // Have large write-on/wipe-off walls where people can draw, envision new solutions and communicate in pictures. Doing this taps the right (creative) side of our brains.

WALKING MEETINGS // Our brains work far better when we are active rather than stationary. Hold more walking meetings.



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