

Want Workers Back in the Office? 3 Ways to Make Your Space Worth the Commute

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IA Interior Architects is helping clients reimagine their offices as spaces for employees to rediscover the joys of collaborating and socializing with colleagues. All images courtesy of IA Interior Architects

Why should we go back to the office?

This is a question Neil Schneider has been tasked with answering. The Chicago-based design director and principal at IA Interior Architects, a firm that specializes in workspaces, is finding new ways to inspire employees to gather in person. "A lot of our clients want to know, what makes our facilities worthy of a commute?" Schneider says. "And the answer is: relationships."

Reminding workers of the joy, support and enrichment they can get from simply being around their colleagues will help revitalize office spaces. But it will require a shift in thinking on the part of employers, and a willingness to create an environment that recognizes employees as people — not just workers.

In addition to added fun and games — IA has proposed everything from in-office climbing walls to outdoor cornhole matches — Schneider says that companies are starting to think about how post-pandemic benefits and policies fit into their spaces.

"People are looking for facilities where they can bring their pets to work or even drop them off nearby at doggy daycare and pick them up after work," he says. "And there are so many concerns about child care, so we're seeing considerations there, too."

IA shared three proposed designs and perks with EBN. We'd happily commute for any of them.



Manage your wellness at work

"With health and wellness on the rise, we looked at how to create a more relaxing environment for individuals to go to a doctor's appointment, therapy session, nutritionist or a massage," Schneider says of this proposal, complete with employees resting in bathrobes, for a client. "With boutique medical services also becoming more prevalent, these flexible amenity spaces are what companies are looking to provide and then the services can be outsourced."



Learn (and share) new skills

"These flexible spaces are great for team-building, and can be used as maker spaces or for classes on flower arranging, candle making, cooking, mixology classes, food drives," Schneider says. "These

are things people did or learned over the pandemic, and now we can use workspaces to create environments where people can share who they are. It's about bringing teams together, and creating something together. Every company is different, and these flex spaces can be customized for the user experience. At its core, it's about rediscovering the joy of being around your colleagues. These experiences and spaces are just the icing on the cake."



Meet outside, for work or play

"Providing spaces both inside and outside a building is becoming very popular," Schneider notes. "Companies are looking for a variety of experiences to create dynamic meetings for their employees. For example, open-air happy hours, team events and guest performances to bring people together are increasingly important to culture. Think about how important outdoor weddings and events have become in your personal life. We're extending that perspective into work culture as well. Plus, for companies, it's not something that has to part of a lease — it can be part of building complexes, to use as needed."