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Rethinking office design post pandemic - by Miika Ebbrell

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Many employers are faced with the need to drastically reduce their office footprint due to their workers transitioning to a more flexible office schedule both during the pandemic and beyond. To help navigate this new reality in the commercial office arena, Massachusetts-based Ebbrell Architecture + Design, a certified Woman-owned Business Enterprise, with licensed architects and interior designers serving Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire has transformed its practice to meet the changing needs of its growing client base.

Both work and play spaces are not only being rethought for a post-COVID world, but for one in which we will be better prepared to manage as space needs continue to fluctuate in the future. As businesses go through this process, we recommend they adopt the approach we used to rethink our business – by being creative, responsive, and diligent in our approach to smart, targeted ideas. For our clients, that means using those same skills to work collaboratively to decide what it's going to take to transform or create a new space that delivers a balance of image, function, and value.

As organizations rethink their space needs, architectural programming has become even more important. Having an accurate inventory and understanding of space needs and company culture will form the foundation of any renovation or new property search and help to both right size the space and develop a design that will support the organization's needs – even when those needs may be shifting. I suggest carefully understanding and analyzing space usage, and in some cases even implementing technology solutions such as workstation and room scheduling software to optimize remote and in-office calendars, which is of critical importance as return-to-workplace and new safety protocols are being implemented.

At Ebbrell Architecture + Design, we prioritize programming early in the design process with a tailored mix of stakeholder surveys, interviews, and focus groups, along with quantitative space analysis tools to fully understand an organization's needs and workplace culture.

I suggest that commercial real estate firms offering owner's project management services, and

commercial developers and lessees looking to renovate or fit out space in an existing building get optimal value by weighting the relative importance of key factors in project design and construction. Your design firm should be an active listener and partner working with your priorities. And to help you get there, your designer should have access to the best contractors and professionals in the area to develop creative and cost-effective solutions to meet your goals.

Regardless of the state of the economy, throwing money at high-end furniture and fixtures isn't necessarily the way to impress clients when they first walk through the door. Our firm, which includes both licensed architects and interior designers, has a broad and varied knowledge of materials and a culture of problem-solving that finds creative ways to accentuate thoughtful and powerful design without breaking the budget.

And what about the thought that because of shifting priorities to "safety first" that the look and feel of a space is less important? This should never be an "either-or" decision; you can have both. The image your space reflects should always be a priority. Look at how people's video call backgrounds are assessed by their peers. The image you portray, whether in your personal workspace or your office workspace, will always be a priority and will continue to tell your customers, clients and employees about the culture of your company. Your goal should be a transformational design, that is delivered smoothly and collaboratively, with the client's needs leading the way.

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