

Standing Innovation

Over the past 18 months, I've gained almost two inches (2 inches!) in a place I don't need to, primarily because I changed jobs. My last job consisted of ten to twelve impossibly hectic and mobile travel days per month meeting with colleagues and clients, followed by several days working virtually at home. The travel was stressful and the workdays were long, but I was compensated by more flexible hours on my days at home that allowed me to catch a mid-day Vinyasa class a few times a week. While changing jobs afforded me the chance to move from one great company to another, it was also a drastic change in my work style. Now I'm in an office Monday through Friday, and although my work is varied and stimulating, I often feel the physical and psychological effects of being tethered to my desk; and I miss that Vinyasa class.

Increased Concern for Health and Wellness

I'm not alone. Ever since the Wall Street Journal's July, 2012 article, "Sitting for More Than Three Hours a Day Cuts Life Expectancy" appeared (to be endlessly echoed by myriad media sources) it's been clear that health and wellness has become a serious business concern. Yet compared to sustainability, which came to prominence in the mid-2000's, and took years to produce real bottom line proof statements, compelling health and wellness statistics have quickly emerged. Insurance giant, AON, reports that for every dollar invested in wellness programs, companies can expect a \$3.00 to \$6.00 return. And the cost of not doing anything is even more dramatic. The Institute for Healthcare Consumerism estimates that the indirect costs relating to poor health can be 2-3X direct medical costs. As a result, health and wellness has become the latest clarion call of the office landscape. This is a big topic that would take much more space than this writing allows. To give you an idea of scale, at one end of the spectrum developers are offering more life-style amenities in new and repositioned properties. At the other end of the spectrum, sit-to-stand furniture options have taken center stage.

Solutions to Meet a Rising Need

Bruce Wells, Director of Marketing and Development for benching and trading desk manufacturer Innovant, reports that just in the past six months, 90% of his conversations with clients have centered on sit-to-stand options. Key motivators for concerned employers are the potential health benefits of standing (or more specifically, not sitting all day) and the opportunity to give something back after transitioning employees to smaller benching applications. In providing a choice, the sit-to-stand option offers workers some control over their immediate work environment.



Because this represents a significant workplace investment, there are factors to consider before committing to the sit stand option. First, "who gets it?" Providing everyone with standing desks avoids inequality but could strain the budget. Firms struggling with this might consider supplying them to workers - like traders, call center operators and receptionists - who are less mobile during the workday. Second, a thorough cost/benefit analysis of day one vs. retrofit day two installations is recommended for anyone considering a phased approach. Other considerations include power sources, wire management and monitor arms for retrofit applications; requests for foot rests and stools (vs. chairs); potential HVAC adjustments; and user safety and office etiquette

protocols. Finally, at a cost of \$1000 or more per unit, sit-to-stand desks are likely to be part of a holistic solution rather than the solution itself.

“Inconvenient Planning Strategies”

On the aforementioned spectrum between the amenities being included in new construction and sit-to-stand desks, are some planning options designers have been employing for some time to get people up and out of their seats. Called “Inconvenient Planning Strategies” by my colleague, Ricardo Nabholz, these scenarios evolved over the past decade as companies sought to increase transparency, spontaneous interaction and collaboration throughout the workplace. Conveniently, these same planning tactics also get people moving. Placing staircases in prominent locations encourages people to take the stairs; making them wide enough allows them to stop and have a chat. Dispersing support functions means people have to travel to get to copy/print rooms, pantries, cafés and bathrooms. The proliferation of laptops and wireless technologies have called traditional departmental adjacencies into question, prompting some companies to adopt an unassigned seating policy and/or provide more informal work and collaborative settings - including fixed, standing height benches - that require workers to change locations during the day. More recently, we’ve seen reports of stand-up meetings (that also save time and get people more engaged), and featured in a recent TED talk, even walking meetings.

The Choice Is Ours

Ultimately, while the workplace can indeed support healthy habits, the onus cannot be on the workplace alone. Consider that before we had email and texting, people often had to get up and go find someone to get the answers they needed. And before computers, where it’s easy to gaze and graze, it was difficult to type and eat a sandwich at the same time, so people tended to leave their stations and join colleagues for lunch. Today, it’s up to us to choose options that break our routine, even if they are less convenient. I’m reminded of childhood summers when, before central air conditioning, I spent hot days in my cool basement reading a book while my mother implored me to “put that book down and go get some sun.” Appeasing Mom, I also knew that changing it up was good for me. If Mom were here now she’d say “leave the laptop and go take a walk, think, have a conversation.” With Mom’s voice in my ear, I’ve begun to find ways to take breaks much as I did when working at home. Happily, I’ve found that not only can I still get my work done, I’ve also begun to feel more in control. I now save my Vinyasa for the weekends, but I’m delighted to say that the little changes in my work routine have started to make a dent in those 2 inches.



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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WORKPLACE INNOVATION

People are a company’s most valuable asset and in today’s business environment it is people who make the difference. Our mission is to combine real estate, technology and business processes to create exceptional spaces that empower people to do their best work. We align design solutions with actual business drivers and create performance metrics to establish a feedback loop that continues to inform. This builds agility into the workplace to support the way people work today while enabling its evolution to support the way they will work in the future.



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