The Transformation of Workspaces Post COVID-19

What will office layouts look like on the other side of COVID-19? Will COVID-19 be the catalyst that reverses the ever-popular trend of open concept floorplans? What equipment or space changes should be made to minimize virus spread as much as possible? These questions are on the minds of employers so we asked a member company from our roundtables, Creative Business Interiors, to shed some light on post pandemic planning that is currently underway at their workplace.

Stephanie Anderson, Co-Founder and Executive VP and Verna Shavlik, Director of Design Services are creating scalable models that will help employers navigate the new normal. "We need to work together to keep a sense of community while creating the separation that people need to feel safe. Workspaces should be thoughtfully configured with a focus on technology, safety and hygienic materials," says Anderson.

Both traditional and modern floor layouts will need essential modifications to adapt to the social norms brought on by COVID-19. There will be renewed vigor around installing cutting edge and contactless technological solutions to reduce the opportunity for disease transmission. Shavlik signaled, "There is no doubt that COVID-19 will change the construction methodology for offices in the future."

So, what office design planning should employers be doing now to position themselves to hit the ground running as they rebound from COVID-19? Here are some things to consider:

Short-term:
- Adding sanitation stations along with key signage
- Taping off social distancing lines
- Turning around workstations that face each other
- Installing dividers between workstations
- Increasing the height of workstation dividers, especially with the growing number of standing desks
- Decreasing shared spaces as well as conference room capacity
- Reducing the number of chairs and spacing out tables in common areas such as break rooms

Long-term:
- Replacing upholstery with hygienic/wipeable materials and adopt hard surfaces where possible
- Reconfiguring wider hallways, larger bathroom and kitchen space
- Improving air circulation systems with an emphasis on fresh air intake and enhanced filtration
- Focusing on modular office designs for ease of future configuration needs
- Installing automatic doors, faucets, and hand dryers to reduce "touch" points throughout the building
- Implementing electronic storage options to reduce on-site footprint
- Investing in UV lighting to disinfect offices at night
- Utilizing voice command technology in place of traditional push-button operations
- Reviewing overall office footprint consolidation options in light of remote work trends and expectations

Carefully balancing employee health and wellness together with operational considerations will be paramount post COVID-19. Employers should proceed with caution and avoid knee-jerk reactions when it comes to office layout redesigns. Be sure to consider your organization's future growth, employee footprint, as well as the return on investment when making large scale changes to your office environment.