



By Julie Desmond
julie@insightnews.com

Success is elastic: ask ten people to explain it and you will hear ten definitions. Words like progress, accomplishment, dollars, and impact all play a part in describing success, along with creativity, innovation and sweat equity. But in business, the bottom line is results. The challenge to companies today is to achieve those results in highly competitive arenas where even the environmental impact of an initiative is publicly scrutinized. Lately, a few local companies have met that challenge with remarkable agility and fabulous results.

Imagine having the freedom at work to choose for yourself when, where and how you achieve results. At global medical device manufacturer American Medical Systems (AMS), the vision was to facilitate success by altering the working landscape both physically and emotionally. AMS looked at ways employees utilized both their personal workspace and the wide range of communication tools available today and developed “Lifeworks,” a transformation that will likely be a model for corporate workspaces going forward.

Physically, the new AMS environment is a dynamic, community-oriented space. Employees keep personal belongings in professional-style lockers and choose from available desks or meeting areas, rather than being assigned their own personal real estate. Do people fight for certain desks or meeting rooms? “There isn’t a bad seat in the house,” says Dave McGinty, AMS Global Real Estate & Facilities Manager. And he’s right.

Just entering the Lifeworks space evokes a sense of calm productivity. Rather than long lines of cubes with narrow walkways, the Lifeworks space has a feel of openness, with creative use of glass walls and multi-level partitions which also can serve as white boards and projection surfaces. The design scheme is decidedly 21st century, but the feel is one of comfortable camaraderie. Picture a variety of tables, desks, and cozy seating areas as well as meeting rooms with state-of-the-art technology. It’s kind of Caribou Coffee meets Buzz Lightyear, and so far it seems to be working.

Employees appreciate the flexibility to determine their own schedules and workspaces. Responsibilities don’t change; full time work is full time work, but the ability to do that work according to what works for you means less stress and, ultimately, improved productivity. Managers will now gauge performance more directly on goals and results rather than on whether someone took a long lunch or had one too many dentist appointments.

Tomorrow's workspace works today

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Thursday, 11 November 2010 15:53

Employers like AMS and General Mills, another local leader in this initiative, find that offering a streamlined, flexible environment helps attract and keep top talent, enhancing business continuity and innovation while actually reducing overhead by eliminating the need for excess workspace and resources.

Can it get any better than this? Only if the environment benefits, as well. Reducing the physical space a company demands means reducing energy usage, air pollution and more.

"Flexible work is here to stay," says the team at AMS. It might take some getting used to, but so did recycling, email and indoor plumbing. And like all of those, this could turn out to be a positive change all the way around.

Julie Desmond has fifteen years recruiting and career planning experience. She currently leads job search and career planning seminars for Help Wanted! Workshops in Minneapolis, St Paul and Edina, MN. Write to Julie@InsightNews.com.