

Greener Office Spaces Could Drive the Return To Work



The return to work is a fraught topic for many industries, with some employees pushing back hard on remote working coming to an end. With many workers walking away from employment that no longer suits them, and high office vacancy rates still expected for 2022, there's a strong need to strategize better incentives for getting workers back in the office.

One of the incentives companies are using to achieve this is greener, healthier workspaces. According to a recent Forbes article, behemoths like Google and Amazon are pouring billions of dollars into new office spaces and plan to up the appeal of these new offerings by incorporating green amenities and natural spaces into their design.

Biophilic Design for Productive Workspaces

In addition to being more appealing for workers, greener workspaces can result in some solid gains in productivity. Workplace design specialists Convene, quoting from recent studies, say: "Biophilic design (when living green plants are integrated into office design) also has scientific backing. Workers exposed to greenery in their daily work lives report a 15% higher level of well-being, are 6% more productive, and are 15% more creative."

They add that gaining these benefits doesn't need to be complicated. Simple changes, such as adding a few visually "high-impact" plants and providing outside seating areas, can kickstart the process without the need for a massive outlay.

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New Standards for Green

A less tangible, but equally important, consideration for green design is whether the building is “healthy.” In the wake of the pandemic, that means looking at ventilation and airflow or, as Harvard Professor Joseph Allen puts it: “COVID-19 will prompt people to ask more questions about their workplaces—and will force the hand of employers and building owners. Foosball tables are no longer enough. The world finally has to pay attention to indoor air.”

He adds that, besides creating healthier workplaces, boosting air inflow is another factor in increasing productivity and cognition, for a more engaged workforce.

Sustainability Driving Up Price and Demand

For commercial real estate, there are tangible benefits to making these kinds of changes to office space, as well as aiming for sustainability and carbon-neutrality in new developments.

According to the latest Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) sustainability report, 55% of global CRE professionals surveyed say that demand for green and sustainable buildings has risen in their region. The report adds that many of those professionals agreed that those buildings were also achieving higher rent and sale price premiums and that demand is currently highest in Europe.

A New Green Bottom Line?

Overall, it's likely to be a combination of incentives that will draw companies and workers back into the office through 2022. While making the move towards green might not reverse the office slump in the short term, over a longer period, green initiatives should certainly be considered part of a robust CRE strategy.

Because what is certain is that, for at least some workers and companies, greener and healthier workspaces are going to be a must-have in the return to work negotiation.

