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## IMPERSONAL BORING WORK A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM IN THE BUSINESS WORLD

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In the remaining years of the 20th century, there will be a sellers' market for labor. The baby boom is over. Good employees will be scarce. Management will have to try very hard to keep their best employees.

Yet, we have been living through a period when working conditions are, from an emotional standpoint, at an all-time low. Physical working conditions are good. Health plans are good. Retirement, for some, is good. In some companies, incentive-programs are good. But do people love the places where they work. Do they love their work. Is it as pleasant to be at work, as it is to be at home. Unfortunately not. In most cases the work-place is unpleasant and destructive emotionally. A sea of office furniture. An impersonal place. A place where employees wait for 5 o'clock.

*all this happens because*  
~~In the vast majority of cases, offices are not so pleasant. It is physically unpleasant at work. The work-place alienates the employees, creates an impersonal working atmosphere -- and, more important -- it creates an atmosphere in which people can't get any work done.~~

The main issue is that the 20th century office is entirely impersonal. People have trouble getting any work done, because the work-place is governed and controlled by images of what a company "ought to look like", not by practical visions of a comfortable work environment in which people really can work with pleasure, as hard as they want to, and as effectively as they want to.

The companies that succeed in the 1990's and in the early decades of the 21st century, will be those companies which create conditions where work is fun, stimulating, challenging, rewarding -- and above all, where the good people control their own work.

To control their own work, to be effective, people will obviously have to control their own work PLACE. Each

person has a unique style of work. When allowed to develop this unique style of work, people become effective, productive, creative. If forced to work in the mould set by someone else, it is very hard indeed to do your best work.

So -- quite simply -- doing your best work depends on having a work-place which is arranged and organized by YOU.

For self-employed people this is obvious. If you visit an entrepreneur, or any self employed person, you are always struck by the fact that the environment -- the way the work is done -- is always unique, either to that person, or to that group of people. It is impossible to imagine the creative entrepreneurs who inspire American business, working as cogs in someone else's machine.

The interaction between the environment and the work is much more profound than one might imagine. The environment is the physical setting which expresses the possibility of work, and which governs the minutiae of work. To work effectively, in your own style, and in your own most efficient way, you must be free to arrange the environment so that it supports this work. That means, you have to fine tune and tailor the environment so that it supports exactly your work patterns, not someone else's -- and so that it is uniquely, and efficiently supporting every tiny move you make, every subtle way in which you sit and talk with people, the conditions in which you arrange your working materials, the conditions which allow the people who work under you to be themselves, and to work effectively together.

The taboo, which makes the office a place where you cant really work -- but which seeks an image that is supposed to impress clients and workers -- is on its last legs.

Creative employers are going to realize that they must make a better work environment, simply in order to keep their best employees, and to stimulate their employees to better work. This will require an approach to the environment which allows each person, and each group, to achieve a genuine emotional comfort...a new kind of environment in which the well being at the office is as great as the well being at home... an atmosphere is personal freedom, in which groups are encouraged to make their own environment as productive as possible, and in which the joy of work, and the unique character of individual people, and individual groups, is recognized, established and supported.

This is an entirely new vision of the office.

I believe that this new vision will be heralded by a new

vision of the physical work-place, not only by new styles of management. A new kind of physical furniture and furnishing, which encourages individual expression and individual patterns of work, and a style of management which respects the workers, and which encourages the formation of unique domains, in which people can be themselves, and in which individual people, and groups of people, are able to put out their best efforts, have fun, and do a tremendous amount of work.

So far the big companies have entirely failed to produce this atmosphere. Steelcase, Herman Miller, Haworth, Knoll, Sunar Hauserman, Westinghouse, have all been making the same furniture -- a style of environment in which people are cogs in the company machine, victims of the company image, and not human persons in any effective, kind or useful way.

During the next decade we shall see an entirely new kind of work environment, which is made to cater to real individual need, not to image -- and which provides, as part of its mode of functioning, a way, and process, by which managers, facilities managers, and department managers, can actually allow their employees to get the environment they want, without a great deal of effort or trouble in the physical plant.

To some degree the present alienating and terrible environment which exists, exists because the management problem of laying out furniture in a large corporate office is enormous. There are problems of inventory, flexibility rotation of personnel, which make it extremely difficult to manage the environment well, and tends to reward those facilities managers who take a mechanical and impersonal approach to the office payout problem.

The new systems of furniture will be based, most fundamentally, on ways of managing office space, that allow individuals and groups to have the environment they want, without putting a burden on the company, or on the facilities manager.

Within this new environment, the facilities manager will become the friend of the employees, because it will be possible for him (her) to provide just what the working staff want. It will be his function to provide a flexible and adapted space, in which each part is unique, yet in which groups work as wholes, and in which the feeling of belonging to the company, is increased, not reduced, by the great creative liberty which allows each person to get his and her own working needs completely solved.

Thus the new office environment will arise as a result of cooperation between office managers who see it in their interest to provide something that makes people happy and

effective, and a system of furniture and environment which is able to provide just what each individual person wants.

In this world, I believe the work-place will be as friendly and effectively as your home. The efficiency of American workers will increase, absenteeism will go down. Length of stay in a company will increase. Responsible and effective contributions to the life of the company will increase.