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## The New Office

- **WORK PLACE INNOVATIONS ENHANCE EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND PRODUCTIVITY**
- **OFFICES SEEK MORE HOSPITABLE FURNITURE**
- **CUTTING-EDGE OFFICE TECHNOLOGY BECOMING MORE AFFORDABLE**

Jeff Griffin, Wilson-Heirgood Associates; Dawnne Linenbrink, Muhlheim Boyd; and Greg Hansen, Balzhiser & Hubbard Engineers share their thoughts on taking innovative strides in improving the work place environment.

# Not your Father's Office: Work Place Innovations Enhance Employee Satisfaction and Productivity

by Jessica Corcoran

**IN AN INCREASINGLY GLOBAL ECONOMY AND DIGITAL WORLD**, businesses are changing with the times and discovering new ways to increase worker productivity and enhance satisfaction. Three local companies are taking innovative strides to enhance the work environment for their employees, and thus, the bottom line.

## MUHLHEIM BOYD



*Dawnne Linenbrink, senior advanced certified paralegal and law office administrator at Muhlheim Boyd*

Muhlheim Boyd, a six-attorney firm based in Eugene that specializes in commercial disputes and reorganizations, knows firsthand how paper intensive the legal industry can be – especially in the realm of commercial

disputes. Before implementation of a cutting-edge electronic filing system, it was common for files from one single case to take up an entire five-drawer, 40-inch file cabinet. In the case of one client, Muhlheim Boyd had 43 file cabinets of paperwork.

“That’s what started us on this process,” says Dawnne Linenbrink, senior advanced certified paralegal and law office administrator at Muhlheim Boyd. “Managing that amount of information was difficult and was a huge drain on time and resources.”

In search of a more efficient way to maintain and organize files in the early 2000s, the firm’s staff began toying with imaging technology. They began scanning documents and entering them into the electronic system, which saved tremendous amounts

of time. In 2002, the firm began in earnest to shift to an entirely electronic filing system.

**Before implementing its cutting-edge electronic filing system, it was common for files from one single case to take up an entire five-drawer, 40-inch file cabinet.**

After studying available technology, the firm selected and implemented a system. Now, any document that enters the Muhlheim Boyd office is immediately scanned and, in so doing, is automatically entered into the system, filed and e-mailed instantaneously to the firm’s attorneys and staff.

And, it’s paid off. After an initial investment of about \$30,000 in equipment, software and consulting fees, the new electronic filing system reduces occupancy costs, a savings of about \$5,000 per year, and reduces the need for nearly two additional employees, a savings of about \$75,000 per year.

There are numerous other benefits that are harder to quantify, Linenbrink says. For example, instead of packing up multiple boxes of files for a court case, driving them to court and transporting them into the courtroom on luggage carts, Muhlheim Boyd’s attorneys can now head to court with a laptop and CD containing all the necessary information without the burden of paper files.

Electronic filing systems are more common among legal firms in Portland and are gaining ground in larger firms locally, but Muhlheim Boyd is among only a handful of local smaller firms to implement such technology, Linenbrink says.

The firm’s employees are also pleased with the new system. “Some were reluctant in the beginning, but

they like it now. They don’t have to run things down anymore and realize it saves them a great deal of time in the long run,” she says. “The paper chase is gone for us.”

## WILSON-HEIRGOOD ASSOCIATES

Wilson-Heirgood Associates, a local risk management and insurance company, has made considerable strides to encourage employee health – and has found those efforts have significantly affected employee productivity and satisfaction.

As part of its risk management services, Wilson-Heirgood offers comprehensive safety training and installs health and wellness programs for clients. But around 2000, CEO Jeff Griffin realized the company wasn’t practicing what it was preaching about health and wellness. Griffin recalls walking into the office’s employee break room and counted 12 fast food bags.

“It was one of those moments where I knew things needed to change,” he says.

His epiphany led to the creation of Spring Shapeup, a walking program to motivate employees to enhance their fitness by getting away from their desks and outside. That became the first step in an ongoing journey to foster healthy choices at Wilson-Heirgood.

**“It was one of those moments where I knew things needed to change”**

Next, the company began providing fruit for breakfast in the break room, and the response from employees was overwhelmingly positive. With employee input, Wilson-Heirgood began providing an array of healthy foods sufficient for each of the company’s nearly 50 workers to eat a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snacks at work.

As company leadership began plans to relocate, they incorporated health and wellness features into the renovations. For example, the new office, opened in August 2005, includes an employee gym and spa-like locker rooms.

Additionally, the company offers bonuses for employees who make and follow through on healthy choices. An extensive wellness program includes a payout for employees based on a schedule of physical

exercise. Workers who commit to exercising a minimum of 30 minutes three times a week can earn up to \$25 a month depending on individual earnings, for an annual total bonus of \$300 to \$400.

The result? Happier, healthier employees. Employee satisfaction among Wilson-Heirgood employees is evident in the company’s extremely low turnover.

And happier, healthier employees are more productive. Workers are more aware, alert and consistent in terms of attendance, according to Cynthia Powers, Wilson-Heirgood’s general manager. Sick day utilization is also down, she says.

“A company’s assets are its employees,” Griffin says. “If you treat employees like you would customers – with respect and support – they’ll grow and prosper.”

## BALZHISER & HUBBARD ENGINEERS

Workers’ physical surroundings influence how they feel and what they’re able to accomplish at work. And many factors that influence the comfort and functionality of a work space can be more subtle than the obvious drawbacks of an uncomfortable chair or the distraction of a cluttered desk.

Greg Hansen, architectural lighting designer with Balzhiser & Hubbard Engineers, is a local expert on the importance of lighting and its effect in the work place.

“Lighting is integral to the work environment – not just productivity, but it’s how we reveal the world,” he says. “Lighting reveals what we need to see, it makes details visible, but it also helps facilitate communication, sets mood and addresses health and safety.”



*Jeff Griffin, CEO at Wilson-Heirgood Associates*

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