

The Power of Programming

The key to designing the perfect workspace is knowing what you need BY LOUIS LA PLANTE

A WELL-DESIGNED work environment is good for business. “Workspaces should not only be functional but also should promote increased productivity, creativity, and aid in employee retention,” says Carl Conner, principal architect for Conner Architecture. Cold and impersonal spaces could decrease morale or hinder your clients’ and customers’ impressions of your business when visiting. Or, departments within your business could be laid out inefficiently, slowing productivity. Properly identifying the needs of a new workspace is the first step toward creating a good design, Conner says.

Good design begins with “project definition.” Commonly referred to as programming, project definition is “an additional service that goes beyond the scope of building design,” says Conner, who has developed a systematic approach to programming during his two decades as an Evansville architect. “Our approach to programming is a process that allows

consideration of many variables and input from multiple users.”

Programming involves several tasks:

Definition of your goals. You might know what you want, says Conner, but what you want isn’t always what you need. “I’ve had clients who come to me and say, ‘We need a 10,000-square-foot building.’ Well, how do they know they need 10,000 square feet? They might actually need less,” Conner says.

The first task during programming is defining the goals of the business. Architects should interview individuals from the company about their needs, asking employees and not just the owners. What would make life easier in the shipping department? Ask the head of the shipping department. What does the accountant’s office really need? The accountant can tell you. “Good programming gets input from many stakeholders, not just the owner,” says Conner, who

sometimes conducts as many as eight interviews a day, facilitates group discussions, and builds consensus among the owners’ design team.

Uncover facts. Conner evaluates users’ existing spaces and then researches similar local, regional, and even national projects that help to determine what a space needs.

Develop and test concepts. During this phase, the architect develops conceptual solutions to individual requirements evaluating which one would best fit the goal. “It is important that designers stay objective in this task,” Conner says, “and not try to solve the entire project in his mind before all the components are defined.”

Determine needs. Conner outlines ideas for his clients, showing square footage for varying spaces, adjacency to other spaces, unique requirements of the activity that the space is being designed for, appropriate feel or “atmosphere” of the space, and proper finishes.

State the problem. The programming culminates with the production of a written document that is used to guide the design. The written program ensures that the many factors necessary for a

successful project are met. The architect should then be ready to design.

From a church with a worship center for 1,000 in Jasper, Ind., to the proposed University of Evansville Baseball Development Center, the scope of Conner’s designs is wide-reaching, and each required programming. Take, for example, the new 36,000-square-foot Orthopaedic Associates medical office building in Newburgh. Conner’s design met the needs of the building’s three main tenants: Orthopaedic Associates, ProgressiveHealth Rehabilitation, and Deaconess’s new Urgent Care. Programming took nearly two months to complete, but Conner’s team was determined to get everyone’s input: doctors, nurses, administrative employees, and even patients. “It’s a matter of logistics,” Conner says. “It’s bringing together the right people to develop the right requirements that produce the right design.” ●



Orthopaedic Associates

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