

This is your chance to really get to know your client's company, personality, and working style. Since you will be working with this client for a number of months or years, it will help to establish positive relationships early. While working on the AmSouth project, we quickly learned that the client's representatives were true Southerners. And, due to the fact that there was no local metropolis offering a variety of cultural experiences near the project site, our project team members began to acclimate themselves by allowing our hosts to introduce us to a variety of Southern customs, including meals with fried green tomatoes and grits. After spending a few months on the project, some members of the team even began unconsciously to develop their own Southern draws, thus further relating to the client. Through these bonding experiences, we were able to gain a solid understanding of the personalities of both workforce members and the corporate culture.

This insight into the client is best gained through a combination of your own research about the company and its business industry combined with invaluable information learned during client insight meetings. These meetings should review the client's organization, corporate goals, and objectives for the future. Some of the basic topics that should be discussed include the following:

Corporate business goals and objectives.

- The goals and objectives offer a look into the background of the company. Often, this discussion is associated with a history lesson of who the company is, where it began, and how it got to where it is today.

Corporate mission statement.

- The mission statement will give you insight into the culture and environment of the company. This will aid in determining how best to approach the client while discussing the project.

Project goals.

- The goals of the new office will vary from client to client. It will be important to understand the specific goals and ensure that they are incorporated into the workplace analysis. Some common goals include increased flexibility, cost effectiveness, sustainable design, employee attraction and retention, and incorporation of better high-technology and data systems.

Management strategies.

- The strategies that a company uses to manage its workforce and company are important to note. These will be the strategies that will be used once the new

office is designed, so they must be accommodated within the new design. If the company is a law firm with a one-to-one attorney-to-legal assistant ratio, it may be important to locate that legal assistant directly adjacent to the attorney he or she is working with. However, if a pool of legal assistants works with a number of attorneys, it may be more efficient to designate an area of an office floor to locate all legal assistants together, so that they may better collaborate and save valuable office space at the same time.

Through discussions of these topics, valuable information can be learned that will form a strong foundation of knowledge for the project. For example, if the client states that one corporate goal is to become more efficient and also increase the size of the corporation, it will be necessary to design a flexible office that can accommodate future growth by potentially modifying workstation sizes and/or adding workstations. Thus, this office would not be designed with a large number of enclosed offices. On the contrary, the office design concept should begin with a design structured around standardized, movable office systems, which should be further analyzed during the workplace analysis.

PROGRAMMING

After gaining an understanding

After gaining an understanding of a client's organization, learning how an organization works, communicates, develops, and processes information is crucial in determining the most effective interior plan and design. Groups within the company work, behave, and interact differently, based on their responsibilities and individual needs.

A tour of the client's existing facilities to gain a basic understanding of the overall operations should occur early in the programming phase. Following the tour of the facilities, the next step is to conduct a series of interviews. The process for interviewing representatives for all the divisions of a corporation may take up to several months, but the wealth of data gathered makes it worth the effort and is essential to the project. For the interviews, the client should select the staff members they believe will be most insightful and