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## FINDING WORK SHOULDN'T BE WORK.

## Here's how to avoid creating a crummy office space

Adam Felson, Founder of officemorph Published 6:30 p.m. ET March 16, 2018



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Ask anyone involved in managing an office renovation and they'll likely tell you the project was frustrating, at best. They may have encountered surprises or made costly mistakes. Maybe the schedule was blown, employees were irritated, and management was unhappy. It likely took a long time for things to get back to normal.

Here are some mistakes to avoid when building out your next office.

### Mistake 1: Bidding out the project

Design-bid-build. This is when the client works with an architect to develop drawings that are sent out to several contractors for bids. This is supposed to get the best pricing available.

Here's why you should rethink this approach.

Time is not on your side.

Seeking competitive bids can add four to six weeks to your project. Consider what's required:

- Preparing a request for proposal
- Ensuring that your drawings are clear and complete
- Walking contractors through your site
- Contractors must get pricing from subcontractors
- Comparing bids

Prepare for change orders: Contractors will price only what's on the drawings. Including additional work will make their bid higher than their competitors. If anything is vague on the drawings, you face the risk of change orders.

Solution: Gain from an early partnership.

Onboarding a contractor before your design is complete will usually lead to smarter, more cost-effective designs with fewer surprises for your budget and schedule.

### Mistake 2: Landlord manages project

Who's the real client?

Most landlords want to get tenant improvements done as quickly as possible so they can start collecting rent. Landlords will complete the bare minimum of their lease obligations. Contractors will value their long-term relationships with the landlord over your one-time project.

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Solution: Choose TIA over turnkey

When possible, opt for a tenant improvement allowance. By agreeing to a TIA, you take control of your own design and budget.

### Mistake 3: Signing lease too soon

Estimate total costs: Before rushing into a lease, you and your broker should partner with design and construction pros to understand your workspace. Your design must be developed enough to give an estimate of costs for your build-out.

Include everything: Beyond construction costs, develop a budget for consulting fees, audio-visual, cabling, furniture, security and other expenses.

Outline who pays for what: Work with your broker and a construction pro to make sure the lease covers everything that may come up during your build-out.

Commit to a realistic schedule: Consult with your contractor to make sure a preliminary schedule has been developed. Set dates in the lease for when either landlord or tenant will reach each milestone.

### Mistake 4: Not including employees

Employees happy with their workspace are more engaged, have higher job satisfaction, make better co-workers and show more support for corporate goals. Good office design also makes it easier to recruit new hires.

These three steps make for an effective approach.

Survey employees: Send a simple survey to your employees who will work in the new space. Ask questions to get an understanding of what they hope to see, and any issues with the current office that you should avoid with the new space.

Interview department heads: Ask about their current and projected headcount and any special space requirements.

Hold a design charrette: This meeting should be held with key stakeholders and your design team, to set goals and develop initial concepts for the new workspace.

### Mistake 5: One open workspace

Over half a century ago, companies began converting private offices into open spaces. It seemed like a good way to use space efficiently and save money.

Later, laptops and smartphones enabled employees to connect from anywhere. This led to the inevitable question, "Why even come to the office?"

Open offices lead to more distractions, higher stress and more sick days. While employees working in open offices may feel like part of a laid-back, innovative enterprise, they suffer more interruptions, get less done and have worse motivation.

The solution: Offer mobile employees choices that match their tasks.

Craft an office that everyone will be excited about, by including the following spaces:

**The living room:** Using comfortable furniture like a home or cafe, give employees a space where they can bring their laptops for an hour or two. It let's them have a conversation without tying up a formal conference room.

**Phone booths:** Private rooms that are just big enough for one or two people to make a phone call.

**The library:** An enclosed, quiet room with multiple desks where people can read, write or think. Enforce one important rule here: no talking.

**Home base:** Every employee needs a workstation to call their own and store their belongings. Progressive firms have made work surfaces as small as 2 x 4 feet to allow for more collaborative spaces like phone booths and living rooms.

Adam Felson is the founder of officemorph, a San Francisco-based commercial project management firm. Read Adam Felson's guidebook, "13 Mistakes to Avoid When Building Out Your Next Office."



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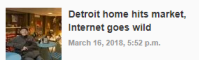
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