Workplaces

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Workplaces

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trends that affect your bottom line, to new products
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will help you run a better, more informed company.
ROB KIRKBRIDE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
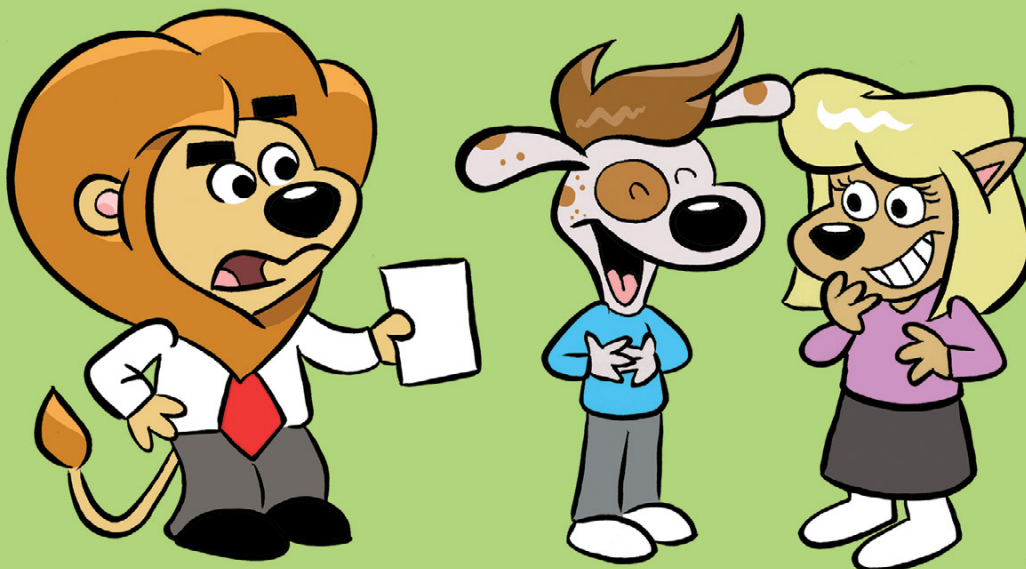
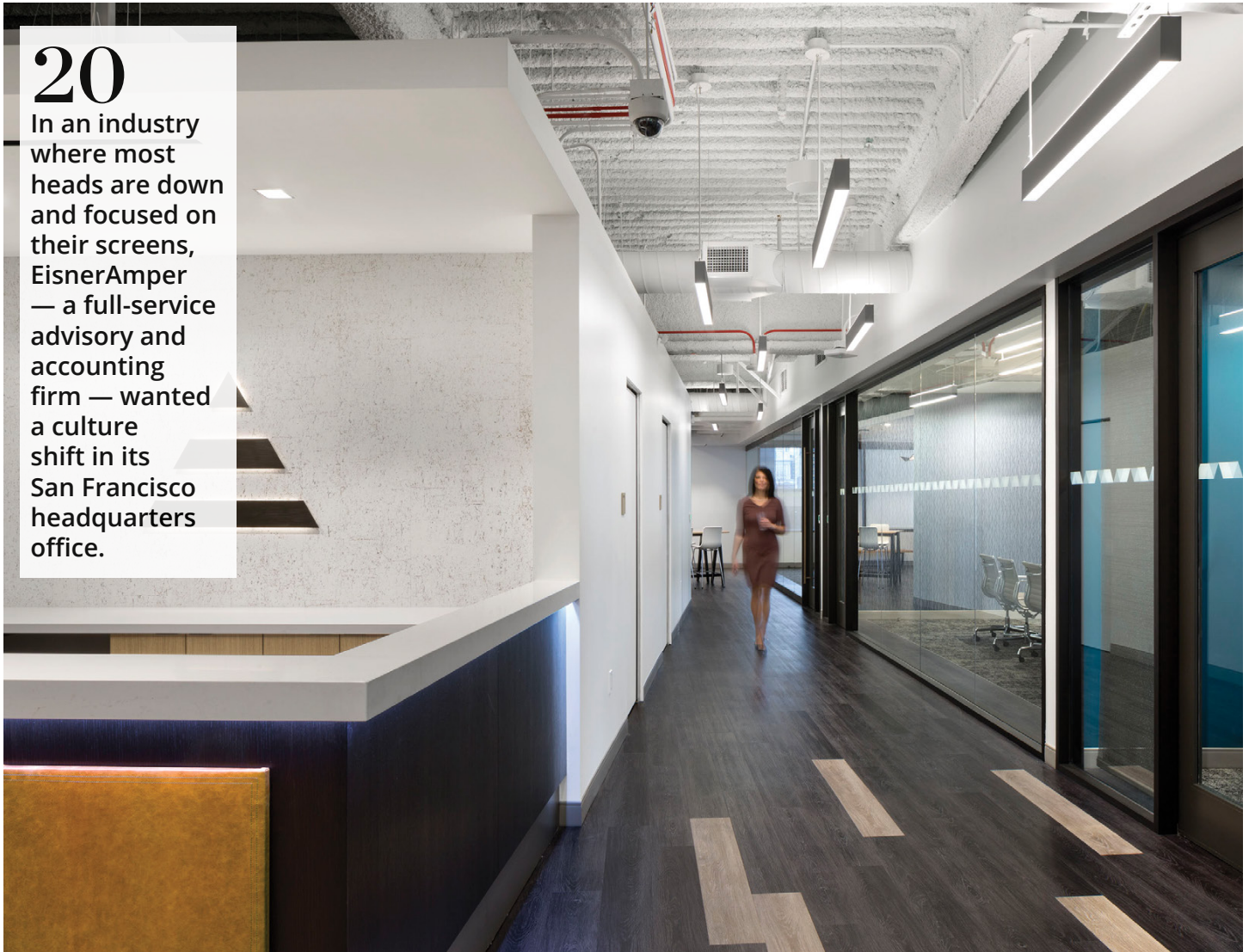**20** In an industry where most heads are down and focused on their screens, EisnerAmper — a full-service advisory and accounting firm — wanted a culture shift in its San Francisco headquarters office.

10. WHERE I'M WORKING:

Most hotels don't make it easy for you to work. It's their job to give you a comfortable room, not a comfortable work environment. So when you find one that actually seems to care about the business traveler, it is worth noting and celebrating.

12. NEARLY 15 PERCENT OF JOB SEEKERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO LAND A NEW JOB

Some social media platforms, including Facebook, are launching their own recruiting platforms for businesses. Recruiters can gather job applications, conduct interviews and even extend offers without leaving the platform.

14. HOW THE RIGHT PRODUCTS AND SIMPLE ROUTINES CAN KEEP US ACTIVE IN OUR WORKSPACE

The modern workplace is a study in tensions. The majority of white collar workplaces require employees to be indoors, seated, and engaging with a laptop, desktop, or tablet for much of the day. The result is arguably an era of unprecedented "productivity," but one that denies or diminishes the attendant health costs of a sedentary and all but immobile workforce.

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The right furniture is needed to foster creativity in coworking spaces.

HOW THE RIGHT PRODUCTS AND SIMPLE ROUTINES CAN KEEP US ACTIVE IN OUR WORKSPACE BY OM WITH ROB KIRKBRIDE

The modern workplace is a study in tensions. The majority of white collar workplaces require employees to be indoors, seated, and engaging with a laptop, desktop, or tablet for much of the day. The result is arguably an era of unprecedented "productivity," but one that denies or diminishes the attendant health costs of a sedentary and all but immobile workforce.

Throughout history, human beings have survived through manual labor — they've exercised their bodies farming, hunting, and building, while challenging their minds in problem solving with math, engineering, behavioral observation, pattern recognition, and more. This vibrant, lived experience requires the human animal to use the full range of his or her senses throughout a day and a life. In contrast, the 21st century office-bound human exists in a world of seemingly limitless potential and access to information, yet constrained in physical movement and sensory stimulation. And it's making us sick. Leading research centers, most notably The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, identify the numerous health issues correlated to physical inactivity, which include a risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, some cancers, and even depression.

Commonly cited statistics report that American employees spend 7.6 hours a day on average at their place of employment — and let's not add the hours spent commuting, usually seated in a car, bus, or train/subway. Given business's outsize influence on the average American's waking hours, what role do companies play in promoting practices that can increase their employees' physical activity and potentially affect the health of tens of millions of working adults?

As the workplace revolutionizes in location, mode, and design, some companies are building gyms and installing ping pong tables, while others are instituting programs such as lunchtime yoga and walking contests that encourage physical fitness and wellbeing. The larger issue, though, are the hours the average worker sits — or stands! — at their desks. How can workers stay active throughout the day, even when working at their desks? Desks and office chairs are not intended to be physical fitness devices, but if the right office design and the right products are used, the workstation itself can promote activity. We're talking now about the crucial, ongoing activity that can reduce or eliminate repetitive motion

stress injuries, tension in the neck and shoulders, circulation issues from pressure points, lower back pain from a lack of support, and more —— the micro stresses and strains that add up, over a career, to chronic health issues.

The focus of this article is on ongoing, light activity at a workstation — movement that is encouraged or facilitated by the products you use to promote activity that reduces or eliminates stress and strain, allows for stretch and release, and encourages blood flow and good posture. If we take as a given that the modern office requires everyone to have or use, in one way or another, a system of work-supportive products that includes a desk, a chair, and technology, let's explore some ways that all three can promote healthy movement.

One trending category is height-adjustable standing desks or desk risers that help workers move from sitting and slouched to an upright position. These desks get you out of your seat and on your feet, although recent reporting reveals that standing too long is just as bad for you as sitting too long. The key here may be the mantra "moderation in all things!" The behavioral shift that comes with standing, however, is that the body naturally fidgets. You shift your weight from foot to foot, you spread your stance. You rotate and stretch your hips and lower back. You bend your knees. Standing engages you in both a more conscious ongoing awareness of how your body feels and with the freedom to adjust in response to how you feel. Anecdotal observation suggests that our standing posture shifts in a subconscious choreography with our work: we move in ways that reflect what we are writing, reading, and thinking.

Medical studies about standing report varied outcomes, from the potential for weight loss to an increased likelihood of heart disease. Bethany Barone Gibbs, an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh who has studied standing and sitting, said good standing desk ergonomics are important to

ensure you're working smart. "Simple things like not wearing high heels (you can swap out for flats or slippers while at your desk if needed), having the top of the computer screen at about eye level, and varying posture (sit-to-stand) often are important for other types of outcomes like pain and fatigue," Ms. Gibbs stated.

THE RADICAL ADVANTAGE OF A SELF-AD-JUSTING CHAIR IS THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO USE IT.

Since the definitive science is still out on the subject, it is safe to say active offices should have a mix of spaces that promote both healthy standing and healthy sitting. So let's segue to sitting. Though much has been made about sitting and health, sitting is still a natural and necessary part of the workday.

The advent of ergonomics as a critical component of design has created a category of seating referred to as active seating. Unlike standing, in which the person has total autonomy over her or his movements, sitting dictates that the equipment itself be the critical factor. Selecting the right kind of chair makes or breaks the experience of and your ability to be "active." Foremost, the ideal active office chair has to be easy to use. In fact, in order to best promote movement, the chair has to allow you to move without you also needing to find, turn, lift, understand, or otherwise manipulate paddles, levers, and knobs. The chair has to allow for movement without you having to think about it — the same way your body moves and adjusts while standing without you consciously thinking about it. The answer? More and more designers and manufacturers are introducing self-adjusting chairs.

So there are two potential approaches: the first is a chair that is well-designed to adapt to your work day and work-ways. This would be a chair that moves when you move. More on this below. The second is that as more offices convert to open plan spaces with flexible work zones, employees can move from a conference room to a touch down space to a day cubicle. The different types of seating arrayed throughout these workspaces then encourage the user to dynamically move through the entire space using these different seating modes, resulting in an ergonomically needed "daily postural variety." These chairs range from multi-functional ultra-ergonomic task chairs and easy lounge chairs, to sit-how-you-wat-to learning chairs and self-adjusting conference chairs. With self-adjusting chairs, the chair would be at-the-ready to respond to the employee's individual quirks and stats. Height, weight, size, and posture preference are all accommodated. A self-adjusting chair can work for employees who can or must switch stations throughout the day or week, as well as employees who actually move IN their chair throughout the day.

So that's back to our first point: the chair that moves when you move. The radical advantage of a self-adjusting chair is that you don't have to learn how to use it. You don't have to flip it over and explore various paddles and knobs, or take it on a test drive twisting and turning every curious doohickey to discover what each does. You don't have to understand how it works, you don't have to think about it. You just sit. And when you stand up and your colleague slides in to steal your spot, or the IT person finally stops by to update your software, the chair works for him or her, too, regardless of their size and shape and posture preferences.

We talked to Wilson Chow, president of office seating specialist OM and a champion of active workplace seating. When breaking down the history and evolution of responsiveness in traditional office chairs, he referenced OM's own efforts to develop more intuitive seating. The eponymous OM5 Active work chair was their first design not to include a lockout paddle — that is, the device that serves as a brake on user-initiated movement. Replacing the lockout paddle with designed functionality that allowed for range of motion and return meant the chair moved with the user. OM was not the first, but for the time this kind of hands-free functionality was still uncommon. Since then, the ability to vary your posture and position within the seat bed without having to adjust the chair controls each time has become an expected, highly marketable feature. There are pros and cons, however, and Chow notes that the ideal workplace chair is one that finds the sweet spot between providing support and responding to users' movement.

Chow elaborates, "Even seating made to self-adjust has its constraints — the range of sizes that can be genuinely supported by one design is necessarily limited. We encourage seating variety in every workplace, along with a culture that encourages people to move from sitting to standing, from primary task chair to supplemental work chairs throughout the work day, as a means of achieving postural variety."

Office seating behemoths such as Humanscale and Steelcase, not to mention Herman Miller and its iconic Aeron Chair, are not only leading the way with ergonomic studies, ergonomically inspired design adaptation, tech-embedded fabric collaborations, and aesthetically pleasing designs, they are also embedding technology into the office products themselves. These smart sensors are touted as offering convenience and health benefits, linking desks and chairs in an Alexa-style feedback loop that indicates it might be time for you to stand up for a stretch, and whether you are likely

to want your table surface raised or are simply going to the restroom. Surprised? So were we. According to the article we found on Quartz, "The trick is in the smart chair's sensor, which measures the angle at which a seat is swiveled." You can read more here.

Considering our increasing demand for power and tech access on seating ranging from airplane and public lobby seating to library study carrels and hotel lounge areas, it was only a matter of time until the industry began embedding two-way technology into our seating. Smart tech can certainly be a force for good, as its subtle prompts can be like a personal trainer commanding us to do our burpees. The privacy implications are not inconsiderable though.

The market for active office accessories has expanded in turn. One such product is the Hovr gadget, a "swing" for your feet available as an undermounted desk model or free-standing floor version. Manufacturer claims suggest the product promotes blood flow and burns calories. The product looks like a fidgeters dream, while having the enviable benefit of being unconsciously in play at all times. Like a swing in a childhood playground, the structure itself invites movement. In a similar vein, Fluidstance introduced a series of pivoting boards that users balance on while using standing-height desks. The company quotes research from esteemed centers such as the Mayo Clinic and claims as their mantra that "beautifully designed products bring motion and happiness to any workplace." At price points ranging from $189 to $489 the investment required to purchase Fluidstance in lieu of a chair cannot be made lightly.

Staying active is critical to our survival and our wellbeing, and should be encouraged — even if we're the denizens of an urbanized, tech-enabled culture. Re-imagining the nature of the modern workplace, the design of modern office furniture, and the adaptation of modern technology is critical to creating a healthier, more active workplace. Intelligently designed products, especially furniture items that we are in constant interaction with, such as chairs, that contribute to ergonomically appropriate workflows can create healthier people and healthier workplaces. The workplace is a system of interconnected products which collectively can encumber employees, or promote their physical motion and wellbeing. Our goal should be employees who can pop up from a productive morning in their chair with the mental and physical stamina to challenge you to a spirited game of ping pong or outlap you on the employee walking path. A few small adjustments can make a big difference. **WPM**