



PHOTOS: ROD KARMENZIND



Learn from real-life businesses whose workplace design helps them fulfill their missions.

HOW A BAKERY, A BOUTIQUE AND A TOY STORE CREATE THOUGHTFUL SETUPS TO SUPPORT PRODUCTIVE WORKFLOWS.



LESSON NO. 1

Give everyone room to do their best work.

West Town Bakery operates 24 hours a day, creating cakes, doughnuts, cookies, candy and other sweets to be sold in stores across Chicago — tens of thousands of items each week. To pull it off, multiple teams work together, but separately.

For example: Cakes and cookies are baked in the back of the facility and then brought to a glass-walled studio in the front for decoration.

The cake studio has a much cooler temperature than the bakery, where the heat from the ovens could melt frosting, fondant and chocolate. And the studio's large windows provide entertainment for people waiting for tables in the nearby diner.

“Instead of having one big open kitchen, it makes sense to have things divided, because otherwise we'd all just be in each other's way,” says Patrick Wingert, associate partner.

LESSON NO. 2

Allow for flexibility.

At Beadniks in Chicago, anyone can be a jewelry designer. Just choose your favorite beads — they've got every color and material you could want — sit down at a table and get to work. The expert staff help if needed, or you can commission them for a project.

Classes and private parties are an important part of the business, but so is the ability for someone to walk in off the street at any time and start creating.

To that end, owner Lauryn Keenan ensures she always has at least one space open.

“It's key to have two tables so we can have things happening simultaneously,” Keenan says. “I can book parties for the back and still have walk-ins. We never say no.”





LESSON NO. 3

Look for opportunities to promote your mission.

At Cat & Mouse Games, a toy and games store in Chicago for children and adults, owner Linda Schmidt's mission is simple: "To remind people that you're never too old to play and have fun, and toys are something we should embrace our whole lives."

That's why, amid shelves stacked with board games, puzzles, stuffed animals and books, Schmidt has placed stations where people can try out games both classic and new.

People forget how much they love to play "until they're confronted with this jigsaw puzzle, and then they remember, 'Hey, I love jigsaw puzzles.'" Schmidt says. The hands-on opportunities invite them to discover the for-sale products.

LESSON NO. 4

Contract and expand based on business needs.

Saturdays and Sundays are the busiest days for the diner and coffee shop at West Town Bakery, while Tuesdays tend to be the slowest. To reflect that flow, staffing and space contract and expand as needed.

For example, one person can handle the coffee station and bakery counter during the week, but on weekends, they need one person just to prepare coffee drinks. Similarly, a weekday has one or two cooks on the diner line while the weekend sees three. To make space, sauces and condiments are relocated from the diner line to an exterior prep station, where an expeditor — a liaison between the kitchen and servers who works only on weekends — puts finishing touches on dishes.

“Our business levels fluctuate so much, and we need to be able to expand our staff and change our space,” Wingert says.





LESSON NO. 5

Organize with the customer in mind.

At Cat & Mouse Games, products are organized to appeal to the customer, whether an avid gamer or a novice. Schmidt, the owner, accomplishes this by stocking her games in zones: party games for adults in one spot, complex strategy games in another, sensory games for babies in their own area.

To make new customers comfortable, Schmidt has placed the more accessible products and recognizable classics in front, near the doors. Serious hobbyists will find their games in the back; they're more likely to know where to look.

“So when you come in, no matter who you are, you see something familiar,” Schmidt says. After all, “everyone knows what a Rubik’s cube is.”



LESSON NO. 6

Think beyond making money.

At Beadniks, one of the tables where people work on their jewelry projects is right behind a big window visible from the street. There is a modest table fee, but people are welcome to sit and work all day, owner Keenan says. The storefront beckons passersby to come try their hand at design.

That's intentional for Keenan, who likes that her 12-year-old business has become known as a community space. Even the neighborhood dogs are welcome. And that free-flowing energy inspires creativity among the customers and the staff.

“I love that it's open. It has a good vibe,” she says. “Animals and children love it, and that's a good sign.”





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