



A Pattern Language

Linking security and wayfinding

By
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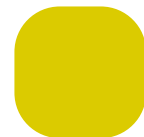
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Initially, the concepts of wayfinding and security seem diametrically opposite. Simply put, wayfinding helps you get some place, and security — more often than not — helps keep you out of certain places. So, how do you help people find their way around, while at the same time, keeping them away from places where they do not belong?

In essence, wayfinding techniques enhance our natural spatial navigation. They provide clues specifically designed to help negotiate the unfamiliar. These hints help us reach destinations, minimize our anxiety in getting lost, and can often help keep us safe.

According to a recent Booz Hamilton Allen study, at least three-quarters of the executives surveyed expressed increased interest in security issues. Interestingly, most of their concerns centered on day-to-day activities such as mail processing, travel, employee protection, and protection of offices and physical plants. Considering this increased interest in the security of daily activities, one wonders if current security practices are still valid.

Christopher Alexander's seminal work, *"A Pattern Language,"* describes spatial problems that occur repeatedly in the environment. His methodology and writings are primarily based on towns, buildings, and construction; however, his work has interesting correlations to office planning.



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A Pattern Language, continued

His reference to roads is easily applicable to the need of directing high volumes of people away from high-security office areas. He states, "Lay out local roads so they form loops. A loop is defined as any stretch of road that makes it impossible for cars that don't have destinations on it to use it as a shortcut." To further discourage high volume, he recommends specific roads be designed considerably narrower than other roads. With that in mind, routes that lead to secure areas should not be on the main path and should not be shortcuts to other locations.

There are also patterns for where and how roads intersect. The concept of a junction is applicable to people meeting and converging at workstations and office hallway intersections. Random meetings are great for collaboration and building social capital; however, they should not occur near high-security areas. Therefore, when considering wayfinding and security, three-way stops are preferable over four-way stops.

The desire for a high-security area in a building is also reflected in Alexander's pattern for housing that is more "private than public". In this same regard, high-security areas should be more remote and not share boundaries with public spaces, café areas, or other gathering places.

No one pattern lives in isolation. A physical environment can support the overlapping needs of wayfinding and security, but only to the extent that one understands the relationships between business objectives, human behavior, and the physical space. An increased awareness in security creates wayfinding challenges — but with thoughtful evaluation and planning, these challenges can be understood and overcome.

Do Opposites Attract?

How do you balance the need to be client-, customer-, and employee-accessible while protecting the same people from potential physical threats? Here are some tips that can help:

- Conduct a risk assessment audit and get a clear understanding of the security issues facing your organization.
- Evaluate access and egress points and determine if you need reception, security cameras, or increased lighting at these locations.
- Explore biometric technologies and determine if these are right for specific high-security areas in your organization.
- Encourage people to know who works in their building so they can help determine who does not "belong".
- Provide limited traffic access to high-security areas and locate these departments away from public spaces.
- Consider posting additional exit signs near the bottom of doors for smoke-related emergencies, so people have no trouble locating exit doors.
- Know your vendors and provide escorts to all mechanical areas of the building.
- Provide heightened visual and acoustical privacy for private areas.
- Use landscaping, foot paths, and lighting to control and direct exterior foot traffic.