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One Workplace Believes a Healthy Workforce Leads to Healthy Business

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For nearly a decade, One Workplace has been named a top employer in the Bay Area — no small feat given the competition there.

The work with its own employees has allowed One Workplace to help its customers as well. As the San Francisco Bay Area begins to open along with its other markets in the Pacific Northwest, One Workplace is helping its customers safely get back to work.

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- Rob Kirkbride, Editor-in-Chief

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one workplace

For nearly a decade, One Workplace has been named a top employer in the Bay Area – no small feat given the competition there.

BY ROB KIRKBRIDE

The pandemic has been a pain for everyone, but as the world emerges from the grip of the COVID crisis, there has been a significant shift when it comes to the workplace. For the first time in Mark Baker's 25 years in the industry, office design, the workplace and the importance of space utilization are critical C-suite – even boardroom – issues.

The pandemic has brought the importance of office design to the forefront, said the chief operating officer of One Workplace, the Bay Area uber dealer. One Workplace is using this new focus on space as an opportunity to show the value that it can bring to its customers and to help them



Above: Mark Baker

navigate the return to the office. One Workplace – and all dealers – have the opportunity to guide customers to the next iteration of the workplace, Baker said, because it is going to be different.

And in the case of the office of the future, Baker is bullish. It is going to be different, but it is going to be better.





“No one’s going to come back to the office exactly the way that they left it,” he said. “And you know, a lot of companies are still really struggling with how to think about that. They’re reaching out to A&D firms for some of that. But they’re also reaching out to us quite a bit. We’ve spent a lot of time developing our research with Steelcase and other insights that we think are really valuable for our customers. Not only are the physical, tangible things being discussed to make the space more compelling, but also a lot of things around change management. How do you get companies and employees comfortable with this new way of working?”

One Workplace helps its customers by helping its own employees first. The company believes strongly in workplace wellness, beginning in its own office.

The more obvious first place One Workplace starts is around ergonomics and making sure

that you’ve got solutions that are going to promote wellbeing. The second level, said Baker, is the wellbeing of its employees (which the company also helps its customers). It is more holistic and includes not only the physical wellbeing, but mental and financial wellness.

“We’ve actually spent a lot of time through the pandemic really trying to stay more closely linked with our employees,” he said. “We’ve communicated more than we ever did about the state of the business, but also making sure that we and our leaders are checking in with all of our employees to see how they’re doing because we’ve got the continuum of people who are working from home that have great setups and others that have a very challenging time with the whole family thing you have to deal with. And so we’ve really worked hard to provide vehicles for people to talk with with some of their coworkers about it.”



That includes creating employee resource groups (a working moms group, for example) and other things where One Workplace employees can find people with similar challenges or opportunities. The company recently signed up an app, TaskHuman, which provides a whole range of wellness support, everything from yoga to meditation to physical wellbeing support. It also provides mental health support. More than 400 One Workplace employees have already signed up to use the app, which Baker said has gotten a lot of great reviews from employees.

The work with its own employees has allowed One Workplace to help its customers as well. As the San Francisco Bay Area begins to open along with its other markets in the Pacific Northwest, One Workplace is helping its customers safely get back to work. One Workplace recently launched its Our Workplace app, a mobile app for the workplace of the future, serving as a central hub for

communications, insights and experiences the company can share with its customers.

“We’re going to start encouraging people to come back to the office and we’ve found an app that we use or will be using to essentially allow for that safe return to the office,” said Baker. “And it includes the kind of necessary healthcare questionnaire before you’re coming in. So the idea would be as you wake up in the morning, if you’re coming in, you open the app and you can answer the health questions and it’ll allow you to reserve a desk.

“We’ve looked at the layouts of all of our desking solutions and where we’ve got proper social distancing and all sorts of things. It’s actually holistic enough that it’s also a place that we can communicate company events and news and that sort of thing. So we’re pretty excited about it as another vehicle of both giving employees that sense of confidence and sense



of comfort that the workplace they're going to be coming back to is going to be safe and something that they can be confident in. But also in a way that we can use it to communicate more broadly about what's going on in the company."

For nearly a decade, One Workplace has been named a top employer in the Bay Area — no small feat given the competition there. Baker said it ranks high because of the holistic approach it takes with employees — the total package — from pay to mental and physical health to financial wellbeing. One Workplace also believes in diversity, equity and inclusion

One Workplace has always been about serving its customers in whatever way is needed. The roots of the company go back to a bookstore founded in the 1920s in downtown San Jose by the Lindsay family. It evolved into an office supply business after World War II. The late Elmo Ferrari went to work for Curtis Lindsay

in 1947 upon his return from World War II. Ferrari used the bicycle to make deliveries. He was renowned for asking customers: "What else can I do for you today?" That became the ethos behind the success of the company — finding products and creating solutions that fit the needs of its customers. In 1975, Ferrari and his wife, Marie, became half-owners. In 1983 the Ferrari family became full owners.

It remained mainly an office supplies business until the mid-1990s, at which time the family sold the supplies business to Corporate Express and decided to double down on furniture. At that time, the business was known as Lindsay-Ferrari. The company acquired Rucker Fuller, which in 1999 was the largest commercial furniture firm in San Francisco, and Lindsay-Ferrari's biggest competitor. That created One Workplace, which grew spectacularly through the dot-com boom.





Just after the boom, unfortunately, came the dot-com bust, which dramatically cut into One Workplace's business. Sales dropped 70 percent in a two year period. It took years to build back up, while suffering through the financial crisis as well.

Those tough years forced One Workplace to evolve further. The company created specialized teams that focused on vertical markets — education and healthcare in particular. One Workplace created dedicated teams that serve those sectors, dedicated sales, dedicated design, dedicated project management and dedicated coordination. Steelcase helped One Workplace identify both construction and technology as potentials for growth as well. One Workplace has expanded that into structural cabling, security, wifi access and other areas so the company can be a turnkey technology solutions provider for its customers.

Its expertise in construction and work with DIRT lead to a separate construction company called Vantis, which works off the idea of prefabricated construction of all kinds.

The company has also worked on what it calls its "onsite services" or "day-two services," which will also be expanded with the OpenSquare acquisition. For One Workplace, those onsite services include things like day-to-day moves, adds, changes and design refresh services.

The continued evolution of One Workplace has led to great success. In the last typical year, the company's sales were \$500 million, a figure that dwarfs most office furniture manufacturers. It also accounts for nearly 14% of Steelcase's sales, which means it is one of the largest dealers in the company's family. One Workplace has more than 1,000 employees. **MP**