



Competing *for* Brand Advocates

A POV on WORKPLACE



Free cold brew coffee, slick décor, dog-friendly meeting rooms, and the ubiquitous ping pong table: many employers, struggling to attract and retain workers in today's hyper-competitive environment, are throwing everything at the problem, while others are doing nothing at all. How did we get here? A low unemployment rate—3.5% at last count¹ means there aren't enough workers to go around. In fact, nearly one-half of employers said it's taking them longer to fill jobs today than in any other period in the post-industrial era².



Adding to the pressure is the fact that workers are increasingly turning to nontraditional forms of employment. The freelance workforce has been growing at three times the rate of the overall US workforce since 2014³. Working on their own terms is especially appealing to younger generations; while 1 in 4 workers across the US workforce freelanced in the past year, that number was at 53% for Gen Z⁴. Coworking is becoming an attractive option for these freelancers; by 2022 the number of US coworking members is expected to rise to 1.1 million, up from half a million in 2017⁵.

It's a buyer's market for employees. Millennials and Gen Z, accounting for over a third of the workforce⁶, expect their work experience to be as seamless as Amazon and as meaningful as their interactions with Aerie, Warby Parker and Nike. Employers have their work cut out for them; in fact, HR leaders have identified employee experience as one of their top priorities for 2020⁷. And it's not just the HQ that you need consider. Workplace and the associate experience extend to factories, distribution centers, break rooms, and remote/shared office space.

How can companies win?

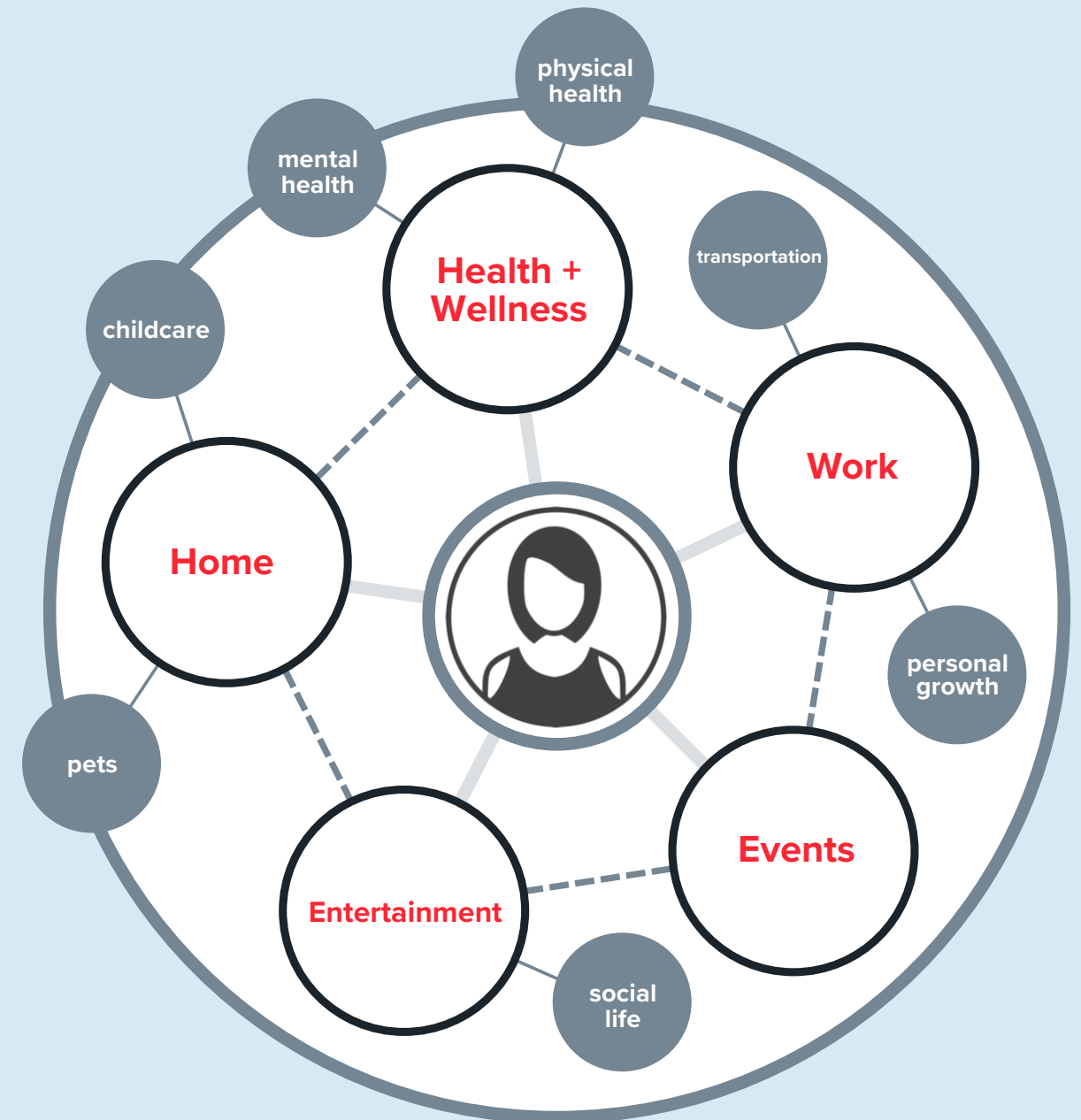


1

Invest in Me as a Whole

If 44% of employees are saying that benefits like PTO, parental leave and healthcare are keeping them at their job, not perks like free food, game rooms, and gyms⁸, what's the takeaway? From the corporate headquarters to the factory floor, companies need to look at a day in the typical worker's life to make sure their investments are addressing the more pressing needs in employees' lives instead of tacking on frivolous perks and nice-to-haves.

ASSOCIATE ECOSYSTEM



When health issues arise, for example, doctor's appointments and phone calls to insurance are an unwelcome way to spend an afternoon. While offering a health advocate is nothing new, employers are making healthcare more convenient by taking matters into their own hands; one in three large U.S. employers has an on-site clinic, up from 24% in 2012⁹. Employers without the means to set up their own clinic are taking advantage of mobile services like Jet Dental, who take over an empty conference room for a few days. By bringing these services on-site, employers can reduce stress and boost the bottom line.

With today's always-on culture driving a burnout epidemic (84% of millennials say they have experienced burnout at their current job)¹⁰, mental

health is top-of-mind. Companies are making strides to even out work-life balance and address the root causes of stress; Beehive PR has a wellness and meditation room shielded from wireless signals, while Daimler automatically deletes emails sent to its employees while they're on vacation. Employers can also alleviate stress by solving for employee 'out of office' needs on-site. SAS's North Carolina headquarters features four cafeterias that are stocked from an on-site farm, allowing employees to order leftovers to take home for dinner. Meanwhile, Lululemon brings its wellness-forward brand to life in the corporate office by offering free workout classes. Dog-centric employer BARK eliminates the need for employees to run home to let the dog out; dogs are welcome in the dog-centric office, which features doggie play areas and treats in the kitchen.

McKesson Headquarters



LULULEMON STORE SUPPORT CENTER

It's important to remember that seemingly minor sensorial tweaks can make a big difference in employee health and wellbeing. Adding greenery has been shown to make employees feel significantly happier, healthier, and more energetic¹¹, and access to natural daylight causes workers to experience a significant drop in eyestrain and headaches¹². Offices are being built with optimized health in mind; The 512W22 office building in Manhattan takes biophilia to the extreme with 17,000 square feet of terraces and roof space planted in native grasses and trees, while employers like Wells Fargo and McKesson are using the International WELL Building Institute's standards to foster health and wellbeing. Only once basic physical and mental health needs are met is it meaningful to move up Maslow's ladder by investing in meeting less critical needs.

87%
of workers wish that
their current employer
offered healthier
workplace benefits



512W22 Office Building

Consider

Have you identified and made steps to address the most pressing points of friction in the lives of your employees?

What are your associates 'dealing with' outside of the workplace and how can you support them?

2

Fit My Way of Life

Today's workers are expected to be flexible when it comes to the shifting demands of the job. Always-on availability has become the new normal; in fact, 50% of employees check work emails in bed¹³. The problem is that employers aren't reciprocating; 96% of U.S. professionals say they need flexibility, but only 47% have it¹⁴. To attract and retain, smart employers are flexing to fit their workers' needs, not the other way around.



The fact is, today's one-size-fits-all offices aren't doing employers any favors. According to Capital One's latest annual Work Environment Survey, 85% of employees say a flexible design is important to them and 77% said they perform better when they have flexible spaces available¹⁵. Going beyond just an open floorplan to offer a spectrum of workspaces, from quiet privacy booths to boisterous collaboration zones, can give employees the ability to choose the environment that maximizes their productivity. Deloitte takes this idea to the extreme; at its Amsterdam office, there are no permanent desks. Instead, workers are assigned a workspace each day based on the tasks on their calendar. An app tracks worker lighting and temperature preferences and automatically adjusts that day's workspace to match.

With a surging population of remote workers, the concept of a workplace has become more fluid. Third party solutions are emerging, like Remote Year, which facilitates working abroad, and Codi, which lets users reserve workspaces in nearby homes. Employers, in a bid to attract these nontraditional workers, are also getting into the coworking game. Microsoft, for example, utilizes WeWork's NYC spaces for several hundred of its sales employees, while Sprint has opened up its own space for coworking that doubles as an accelerator for startups. In a world where employees are expected to be available around the clock and alternative modes of working are becoming increasingly appealing, it's prudent for employers to do what they can to meet employees halfway.



Expensify Headquarters

Consider

How well do you know your employees' needs? Are your workspaces optimized for their full array of need states?

What steps are you taking to ensure that both remote and traditional workers have analogous experiences?

3

Give Me Something to Believe In

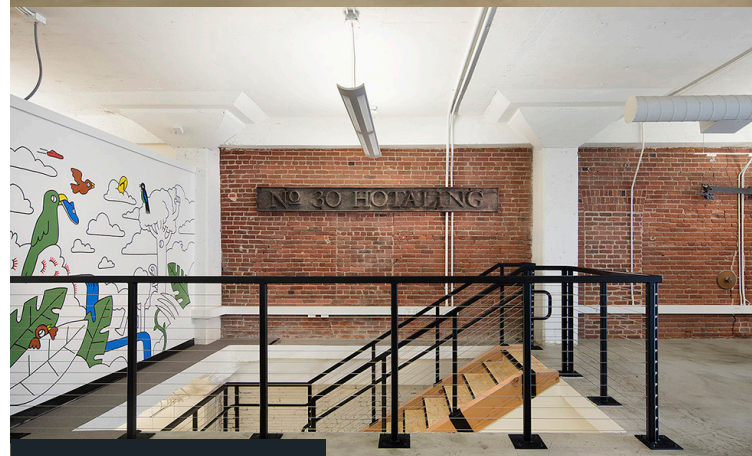
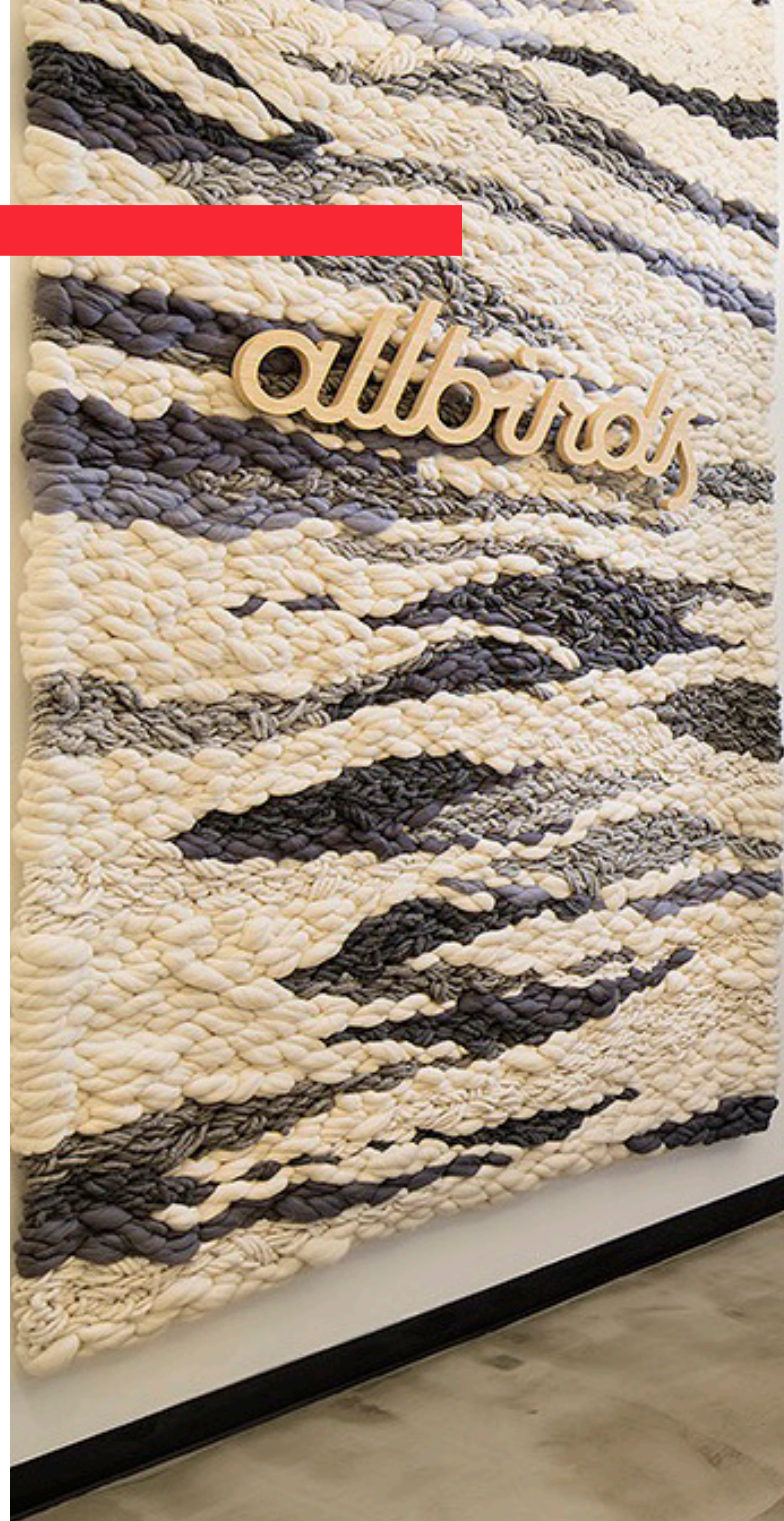
In a time when nine out of ten millennials would consider taking a pay cut to work at a company whose mission and values align with their own¹⁶, companies are striving to give employees a reason to feel good about working for them. Instead of having a holiday party, Nvidia invests in philanthropy, supporting local organizations and encouraging its employees to volunteer. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation matches charitable donations 3:1, and honors anniversary milestones by giving \$5,000+ for employees to donate.



Bumble Headquarters

The physical workspace is an opportunity to bring the brand to life, a tangible way to demonstrate commitment to its culture and beliefs. Branded spaces also serve as a touchpoint for non-employees, a chance to sell your vision to key partners who visit. For example, the Bumble headquarters, with its bold messaging (“Make the first move”) and playful details, brings the brand’s empowerment ethos to the fore for both employees and visitors. The Allbirds HQ speaks to the brand’s environmental stewardship and transparent approach to shoe design; it’s housed in a restored historic building, the lobby features glass-enclosed breakout spaces, and the focal point of the building is a grand central stair. By tuning environments to reflect the brand’s values and tell its story, companies can generate buy-in from both employees and visitors.

Many brands fail to translate their energy, culture and brand messaging into their office space. They tend to focus efforts (and dollars) on outward messaging to consumers, potential customers, etc. and often neglect the audience that is just as important—their own associates. Companies need to go beyond environmental design to incorporate and deliver content that continues to reiterate their brand story in a meaningful way in their workplace. Strategic exercises like associate/visitor journey mapping and content planning allow brands to bring key messages into their workplace, activating technology and the associate journey to tell their brand story.



Allbirds Headquarters

Consider

Are your workspaces turning your employees into brand ambassadors or detractors?

Who else is experiencing your branded spaces? What’s their journey?

Do you have a strategic plan in place to keep content fresh for both employees and visitors?

*So where do you go
from here?*

1

Think like a retailer

When it comes to innovating the customer experience, retailers are one step ahead of employers. Take inspiration from best-in-class retailers; reframe employees as customers and visitors as potential customers, discover their most critical unmet needs, and solve for them through human-centered design, messaging and an optimized employee experience.

2

Consider the parts and the whole

Offer employees the flexibility to choose from a set of diverse working environments that solve for individual needs, both in the corporate office and within the broader workspace ecosystem. Determine the most important elements of the employee experience and leverage a portfolio strategy to bring them to life, whether employees are at a distribution center, the home office, or working from home.

3

Design for change

The past 20 years have drastically changed the spaces in which we work, and the next 20 years will likely change them even more (um, hello AI). Adaptability and designing for flexibility and change is key. It needs to be about more than just flexible desk arrangements and collaboration space; companies should create spaces that serve multiple purposes and can be easily rearranged.

4

Learn your way forward

What works for one employer or work setting may not work for others. Identify KPIs, develop prototypes, measure employee engagement, test out new concepts, ideas and services in one location. And most importantly, iterate until you get it right.

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At WD Partners, we are no strangers to the challenges that come with workplace design. We can help you bring your brand to life through content and key touchpoints connecting your brand story to your workplaces and scaling it appropriately. Working across our integrated services from strategy & insights to branding to operations design to architectural services, WD will develop brand-right experiences for your associates across your entire workplace portfolio. By taking the retail and customer-centric principles we’ve crafted over the last 50 years, we are confident that we can not only dream of a workplace solution, but also bring it to life at scale.



We’re reimagining the customer experience for
the world’s best brands from end-to-end.