

You are Going to Need  
a Professional  
Sometime

a brief guide:

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Helping Brokers  
in 5 Useful Ways

Commercial Interiors -  
Essential Tips  
and Stories  
- part one

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## Helping Brokers in 5 Useful Ways – Commercial Interiors Essential Tips & Stories

This brief guide provides five useful ways we help brokers and understand how the workplace can enrich the employee experience. This is Part One of a continuing educational series provided by Scheirman Associates.

Let's address a few simple areas in which we can help to resolve common problems:

Get tenants in at the lowest cost in the soonest possible time. You get simple solutions: creative designs that maximize space, get permitted and built, fewer headaches, better predictability and happier tenants.

You want to get the deal done right. We want to align with brokers who want to get the deal done without missing a step, who have a host of resources to back them up. We advise brokers on ways to increase density and realize efficiencies, guiding them through the test-fit process and, ultimately, obtain a certificate of occupancy.

### 1. Getting a client's program to fit, or going beyond scope/quality (\$\$).

No one space or negotiation is standard; each is unique. Everyone wants to maximize their space and have a design balanced – both efficient and attractive. Many tenants aren't clear on what exactly they need. We do a space program and objectives evaluation to figure out what size is needed. You probably have already discussed a general layout and proposed a lease area for approval. Once you and the client have zeroed in on the spaces that suit the tenant's needs, our role is to do potential test fits quickly and keep the deal moving along.



Get clear on specifics like floor load capacity: Do you have a safe or a lot of heavy equipment? Then you need re-enforced floors. Or do you need extra electric to your space? Have special telecom needs? Paying attention to these details up front will save you time, money and aggravation down the road.

*When I need someone I can really count on, especially when it is complex problem solving, I think of Scheirman Associates. Steve is friendly, well versed and finds problems before they become one. – Bryan Haase*

### 2. Having to stay on the Architect/designer to get drawings/responses in a timely manner? Not with us.

Time is a commodity; speed and accuracy are virtues. We're told we are fast, complete and good. That's because we understand things happen rapidly. We provide good design, good communication and good project management, from the first discussion all the way to the punch list and closeout phase... with multiple projects in a variety of phases at any one point in time.

*We had a client that wanted to simultaneously "right-size"(get dense) and consolidate from suburban office spaces to the renovated HQ (shed leases. New business units were popping up in every department. The company was growing rapidly in the financial sector (a bit of an understatement as history would prove). A loss of business was measured in large \$\$/minute, so delivering this overall FM/PM had to succeed. Overall scale: about six buildings and 175KSF. Overall time frame: incredulously fast. Response: We deployed two interior design firms in front of the process to meet with the myriad of business unit reps, work with the company's FM and coordinate knock-downs/move-ins. We deployed the engineering firm's two teams behind to strategically undertake facilities in a synched order. In the middle, we coordinated these two streams and provided Architectural and overall PM coordination by working on a 24/7 basis. We had three shifts: daylight, moonlight and overseas. Pretty crazy, but everyone knew what we needed to achieve. As the spaces were turned over, the company moved in, plugged in, turned on and went down its blistering path. Last pieces of the puzzles reached their "done to a more manageable basis" in a 90-day period – somewhat on target (no project is perfect). All in all, the crisis was managed and client was pleased. On to a semi-normal pace for the company's FM and a bit of well-earned R&R for our team.*

Let's just say, we'd rather have the answer before you ask if it's ready yet. It's our nature.

Trust is everything in this business and your need to know we will do everything we do our part to get you to the closing table. You deserve the ability to work with an Architect who keeps the plans under wraps. We're a shoulder you can lean on being a source of quiet counsel, keeping confidentiality.

Meeting with the tenants to understand their needs, confirm the solutions and get reactions to our planning, we move information along to you. For example, the work letter, a menu of finishes to be used, details – such as wall and floor finishes, doors, built-ins, and lighting fixtures – are fleshed out early on and put in writing.

You decide what best fits the deal and what upgrades may possibly be needed.

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*Outside in and inside out... a distinction between the design processes of Architecture (the base shell) and Interiors (work spaces).*

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### 3. The role that the workplace plays (or doesn't play) in employee retention.

Unhappy employees are not likely to make positive contributions to the company. A list of the dissatisfactions revealed in a global Steelcase study<sup>1</sup> that employees highly satisfied with the work place are also the most engaged.

In a May 2017 Study<sup>2</sup> revealed employer (not employee) priorities as:

1. Wellbeing (171)
2. Pay & Benefits (86)
3. Recognition (81)
4. Open & Honest Communications (59)
5. Leadership (42)
6. Purpose, Mission & Values (40)
7. Management (35)
8. Job Design (20)
9. Learning (20)
10. Workspace (11)



Traditionally, these metrics are addressed (by employers/HR) as separate individual programs in individual silos.<sup>3</sup>

Employees see the picture differently, looking at everything that happens at work as an integrated experience. <sup>ibid</sup> There is a shift in the definition of HR. Airbnb appointed a new Global Head of Employee Experience “to oversee and connect everything to do with their workplace-as-an-experience vision”.<sup>4</sup>

Another new study<sup>5</sup> found that “[the] biggest priority for business leaders in 2017 will be retaining employees in a competitive marketplace... [Successful leaders] have paid more attention to improving their employees' experience, paying attention to the ongoing interactions with their office environment, customers, supervisors, and peers that influence employees' behaviors and satisfaction at work.” <sup>ibid.</sup>

The study goes on to list the four ways companies can elevate the employee experience:

- “Offer better compensation (pay fairly),
- Promote career mobility (move across departments... new challenges),
- Encourage flexibility (flex hours/telecommuting) and
- Provide learning opportunities (online, VR training and development).” <sup>ibid</sup>

#### 4. Understanding how design can positively affect the workplace to combine employee engagement, satisfaction and ultimately, worker retention

A Gensler's study<sup>6</sup> in 2013, one of a continuing body of workplace research (beginning from at least 2005), lists three key findings:

- "U.S. workers are struggling to work effectively,
- Effective workplaces balance focus and collaboration, and,
- Choice drives performance and innovation." *ibid.*, pg. 6

The three –step recommendations?

- "Provide effective focus space (Functionality + Quality of Primary Space – such as satisfactory noise level, functionality, design look/feel);
- Collaborate without sacrificing focus (balance proximity + availability of alternative spaces, like meeting spaces, circulation/support and in-office amenities); and
- Drive innovation through choice (enable anywhere working in a variety of spaces, the tool and the policies)." *ibid.*



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OK, so we're not Gensler and you are not Facebook, but these are issues you will be facing (or are dealing with now). Workplace design can have an impact on your success; your employees have an integrated, holistic view. You deserve to work with an Architect who is keeping up with these trends and looking ahead.

*The newly appointed CEO of a medium-sized supply-chain logistics firm contacted us to help reorganize the corporate office to improve workflow and employee morale. The company formerly had "eked by"; the C-level officers were replaced. The new CEO knew things could improve. We looked at the space, reviewed the goals and recommended the reconfiguration.*

*What seems obvious now: Repositioning groups that had related job functions in workstations supporting their activities, improving support spaces that offered better amenities without distracting the teams and moving office managers to be more closely related to the group were key features to adopt. Employees were unsure about the new CEO and further unsure after hearing about a disruption in their workspace.*

*While the company looks at overall goals, the employee looks to where they fit first. We put together the plans, demonstrated how it would be a better workplace for the employees and put their names on their new locations. The move-out, shuffle plan, reconfiguration and move-in were processes clearly communicated to employees before, during and after the process. A successful restructuring of workspace in a case like this has everything to do with expectations (and delivery).*

*We designed the space, managed the build-outs as they were constructed, coordinated the furnishings ordering, delivery and installation, and supported the IT mapping/wiring. Employees became excited about the change and responded positively. The changes weren't as disruptive as they first thought. Disruptions were quickly forgotten. Workflow efficiency increased. Team building morale improved significantly and the business improved. The CEO put people first and knew solutions would follow.*

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*Inside out and outside in... We've learned the better process is a dynamic, interactive, back-and-forth approach – and you benefit when you partner with us.*

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5. Getting it permitted, built and moved in. We keep our eyes on the prize at all times. In the end drawings are coordinated, can be permitted, biddable in your budget and are buildable.

We work hard to avoid delivering plans with missing information or wrong information. All is avoidable with conscientious planning. You rely on us to coordinate the right information within the project team.

The necessary information must be gathered (or assumptions confirmed prior to permit) and the drawings must support what is being provided.

Fundamentally, we keep in mind that the drawings must:

- Take into account the existing space conditions,
- Reflect the approved program,
- Be coordinated with engineering,
- Reflect the requirements of furnishings, furniture and equipment, and
- Support IT configurations.

Getting drawings permitted can present challenges but experience is the key to achieving this goal. We start early, verifying the jurisdiction and codes, and have conversations with the building officials long before turning the project in, so it is not sideswiped during doc review.



“For review” and “pricing” documents show all elements to give a clear picture to the tenant, ready for approval. The documents are used for pricing, for procurement and for installation on the jobsite without losing coordination. Some documents are organized for design-bid-build, some for design/build and others for buy/deliver.

Contractors, suppliers, and installers have their own dominions and focuses. The “drawings” for build-out (permit docs) are prepared with a focus on the general construction. Documents are used to procure case goods and systems furnishings (FF&E) and schedule /sequence the installations and move-ins. Useful “maps” are provided to IT for configurations, including routing / defining IP addresses and locations of the tenant’s equipment.

Understanding (and having designed) all of these parts gives us a great advantage in seeing the whole picture, describing the pieces independently, showing how they fit together and keeping things coordinated.

*A client called us around Memorial Day and said he wanted to be open for business by Labor Day. The project was about 80KSF to be constructed in an existing vacant shell, so at least we had the roof and walls to work with. The comprehensive design and documents phase had to happen with authority and trust in order to achieve. Fortunately, the client trusted our judgment. Most of the reviews consisted of sorting out the variety of procurement decisions (one GC, 15 Owner-directed suppliers). As the design and permit were deliberated, we produced one track for the architecture/ engineering/ GC/subs, another five tracks for major owner’s subs/equipment suppliers/ installers and a list of owner vendor scopes/assumed responsibilities he controlled.*

*As the design docs were nearing completion, we sent them out and asked the GC to call a meeting with all major subs and suppliers so we could address the group. I found myself in a room of about 35 people and knew about three. My lead was, “Most of you don’t know me, but all of you know Mike (the GC). He brought you here because he thinks you can do this job in the time we have. I am unlike other Architects you have met or worked with and you’re going to find out that is a good thing. So here’s our challenge. We’re going to be open by Labor Day. We’re not going to wait to begin for us to finish designing everything...there’s no time. But there is time for you to be proud of the work you do, understand what needs to be done and do it as best you can. If you ask for information, I’ll get it to you. We’ve done this kind of project before. If at any time I am unable to get you what you need in time, you will understand the project and will therefore be empowered to make a good decision. Let Mike know what is needed and keep moving.”*

*You can imagine that this is not what many had heard before. Some were silent and skeptical. Others said that they'd rather get things approved first, so they would do this and that to let us know what they needed to know and by when. Once they engaged, so did the others, and we had a lively interchange. A team was born. Trades put their best people on the job.*

*You get the idea. We all succeed when we work together. Now, the project had some tense moment. It was indeed hard to get everything in synch all the time, but the completed job was open for business by Labor Day (As needed, the final punch list was performed on weekends and after hours). It cost more than it would have in a "traditional" design/bid mode. That drawback was more than made up for by hitting the opening date, having a great design wonderfully executed and enabling awesome performance of the business.*

Now, I am not necessarily recommending this approach for all projects. This was a special case; it did happen. The reason I shared this story is that any project really is better accomplished when the team works together.

It's always good to keep information and direction flowing. We open channels of communication for input and feedback of concerns, timing and sequencing. Good results can happen when the project (and money) keeps moving. We all make adjustments and do things better when there is a team.

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Every relationship needs to start somewhere!

Give us a call. Let's meet, FaceTime, video call.

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Working with us, you'll find we understand:

- That anticipating the delivery of what you need when you need it with good design, speed and accuracy makes every project more rewarding.
- The influence design has on the workplace can be a part of your strategy.
- That people matter and each one can make a difference, and
- That change can be something that is feared or something that is celebrated...all in how it's done and the personalities involved.

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Upside: You'll be glad you did!

You're going to need a professional sometime!

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*Steve Scheirman is founder and Principal of Scheirman Associates Architects, a client-centered practice in Architecture, planning, and design-build. In other multi-state A&E firms, Steve has served as principal, director, project Architect and project manager. He is a registered Architect licensed in Texas and Florida and has been licensed in over twenty other states.*

*Evolving over two decades from being the owner of a general practice to one of a niche specialty firm, his body of work spans commercial & retail, interiors, entertainment, residential and consulting.*

*Steve's style promotes collaboration among teams and disciplines to develop integrated solutions. He now enjoys blending modern design with Universal Design.*

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