

WINTER 2024



## Workplace Insights

### Lessons from the Field: Smart Ideas for a Less Stressful Workplace Renovation

Let's face it: Work is different than it was pre-COVID. Even if your employees are fully back to being in the office, the way the work is done has probably changed, e.g., more Zoom calls with vendors and clients than in-person meetings. And yet, just the thought of undertaking a renovation – never mind the expense – may give you a headache.

As workplace designers, we don't just understand that reluctance: We're living it! Over the course of the past two years, Hixson has been renovating our 1920s-era building, which has not had a major renovation in three decades. We've been updating toilet rooms, adding modern break rooms for our associates, designing new spaces for individual and collaborative work, and more. Using the information learned through this process, along with our decades of experience in the field, we've compiled a few key ideas that can benefit your organization through its own renovation process:

**1. When possible, choose a door (and a wall).** Noise, dust, and interest in what's happening are all germane to the process of renovation. However, instead of only using plastic sheeting to cordon off renovation areas,

consider constructing temporary walls and doors. These will serve as better physical barriers to block the transmission of sound and particulates, and also pose more of a barrier to the curious, who are less likely to enter through a door than to push plastic aside.

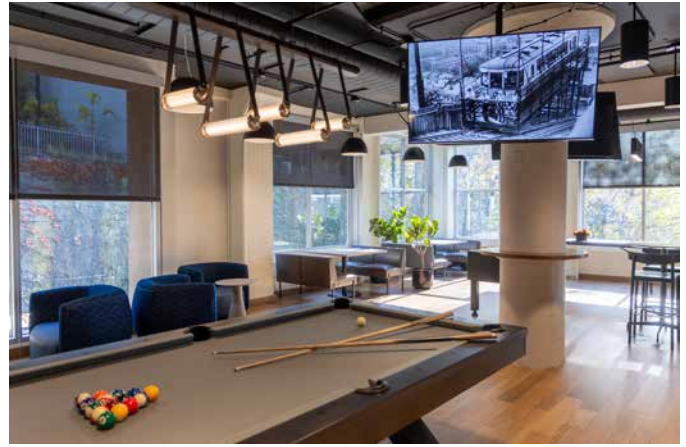
**2. Keep everyone's eyes on the prize.** Construction noise and traffic through the building can be disruptive to the business activities happening around it. Frequent updates are key: The more informed those affected are, the less likely they are to be upset, and the more invested in the final outcome they will be. For example, if hammer drilling will occur on a particular day, alerting the employees who will be most impacted by its noise ahead of time may allow them to book

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alternate spaces in the building, or work from home during that time frame. Keep everyone forward focused by presenting renderings, phasing plans, etc., of the future space so they can visualize the long-term benefits of the process.



- 3. Let people be involved.** Your employees are as invested in the renovation as you are, so even small tokens of inclusion can be good. For example, as we approached the completion of the new break area, Hixson associates were encouraged to submit potential names for the new space. Nearly 70 names were submitted for consideration. (See the “What’s in a Name” block at the end for the winning entry.) The act of submitting names had nothing to do with the physical act of designing or building a break area, but was another way to help create a sense of shared ownership in the process.
- 4. Communicate frequently with the contractor.** Employee communications are not the only communications that need to happen. Make sure you set expectations early with the contracting team, and communicate with them frequently as well...not just about typical project-related issues, but also about how the contractor’s staff will work within your facility. What expectations will your company have of their personnel? Considerations include things such as:
  - Where and at what times can construction materials be brought into the spaces?
  - How will they prevent mud, dirt, and construction debris from being tracked into hallways and non-construction areas?
  - Are there restrooms available that construction personnel can use?
  - Where can their personnel take breaks?
  - Can music be played in the construction area?
  - Are there times during the day that noise-generating activities are not allowed?
- 5. Bring in the declutter fairy.** By their nature, renovations do not occur very often. Because of this, they provide a great opportunity to really think about everything around you, and determine whether it needs to be included in the renovation. For example, during our own renovation, we discovered that we had more equipment, e.g., printers, copiers, file cabinets, shelving, than we needed. Reducing their number has saved on space, maintenance, etc. In addition, as departments have been temporarily re-located, we’ve asked them to think critically whether items being stored in desks, shelves, bookcases and/or closets were still needed. In most cases, departments found that a vast majority of these items were no longer required.
- 6. Stay flexible.** Be able to plan for the unknown *flexibly*. If you are constantly up against the budget, you may not be able to react appropriately when an issue arises...and issues always arise! Reserving some funds for contingency will allow you to make the best choices for the future...not just the solution that may solve the problem today.

- 7. Take stock after each phase.** For projects of a long duration and/or which are phased, make sure to take stock periodically, or after each phase, and evaluate any necessary course corrections or improvements, as well as what should NOT change. Doing so will allow you to learn throughout the process, so you don't repeat the same mistakes. In addition, consider starting your renovation with a "Phase 0," a small test area that's representative of the next areas that will be renovated. This will provide your contractor and their team a lower-risk opportunity to become familiar with the quirks of your facility.

Of course, our renovation here at Hixson is not yet complete! We have several more phases to go over the next few years. Watch for more tips to come in a future edition of Workplace Insights, and be sure to [follow along on our renovation journey!](#)

### What's in a Name?

The selected name for the new Hixson break area for our associates is "The Incline Room." Hixson is located at the base of Mt. Adams in Cincinnati. At one time, this steep hillside used to be home to an incline railway, which, until it closed in the late 1940s, transported horsecars, streetcars, and autos from near our current location to the top, and back again.



### CONTACT US

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