



Designing for dopamine: Why the best workspaces make you feel something

BY ROB KUBIAK | AUGUST 2025

We used to ask, “How do we get people back into the office?” Now the better question is, “Why would they even want to come back?” The answer isn’t free snacks or forced fun Fridays. It’s neuroscience.

The best workplaces today aren’t built around status or square footage; they’re designed around how we feel.

At Rightsize Facility, we’ve watched the workplace shift from a static container of productivity to a dynamic, human-centric experience. And when that experience feels good – dopamine good – people actually want to be there. They perform better. They collaborate more. They stay longer.

This isn’t fluff. It’s chemistry.

The science of feel-good space

Dopamine is the body’s “feel good” neurotransmitter. It drives motivation, memory, movement, and mood. And while it’s often associated with social media hits or guilty pleasure playlists, dopamine is also triggered by our environment – lighting, layout, movement, novelty, even texture.

Research published in the journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*, found that enriched environments – those that stimulate multiple senses – boost dopamine production and cognitive performance.¹

¹ Frontiers in Psychology, “The Role of Enriched Environments in Brain Function” – <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00594/full>

So, what happens when we apply that principle to workplace design? We stop designing spaces for tasks – and start designing for emotion.

What dopamine-driven design looks like

Here's how the workplace is evolving to meet our neurological needs:

1. Movement-friendly layouts:

Static desks and rigid floor plans are out. Modular design, sit-to-stand workstations, walking paths, and “pause points” allow people to move naturally, creating microbursts of dopamine throughout the day.

In fact, even brief movement every 30 minutes has been linked to sharper focus and elevated mood.²

2. Color and light that energize

Natural light has long been known to support circadian health, but we're now seeing intentional use of color theory in breakout areas, focus zones, and even brand-identity walls to elicit specific emotional responses – calm, focus, inspiration, trust.

Rightsize's showroom in Chicago, for example, uses layered lighting and soft biophilic tones to guide energy through the space. The effect is subtle, but you feel it the moment you walk in.

3. Sensory layers that spark joy

It's not just what you see – it's what you touch, hear, and even smell. Upholstered textures, natural materials, acoustic privacy, ambient soundscapes, and subtle scent diffusers (yes, really) all play a role in creating memorable, positive environments.

These multi-sensory triggers don't just make offices Instagrammable – they make them sticky. They give people a reason to linger.

Surprise matters (yes, even in the office)

The human brain loves novelty. We're wired to get small dopamine hits from unexpected moments – new visuals, surprise interactions, or even a shift in the usual routine.

According to a 2023 *Harvard Business Review* study, 61

² CDC Movement Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/adults.html>



percent of employees said “novelty” in the workplace helped them feel more engaged and energized.

Incorporating rotating artwork, seasonal zones, or even “design Easter eggs” into your space (think: an underused hallway turned into a community chalk wall) can create micro-moments that surprise and delight. It's workplace serendipity – with a purpose.

Emotional ROI is business ROI

This isn't just a vibe – there's hard value behind it. Offices that feel good have lower turnover rates. They support mental health, creativity, and engagement. And they give companies a true competitive edge in the hybrid age.

According to Gallup, employees who are engaged and have a strong sense of well-being are 59 percent less likely to look for a job elsewhere.³

Dopamine-driven design is the workplace version of “you had to be there” – and increasingly, people want to be.

Stop designing for looks; start designing for feeling

If the last few years taught us anything, it's that productivity can happen almost anywhere. But connection? Fulfillment? A sense of place? Those are harder to engineer – and far more valuable.

³ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace Report 2024 – <https://www.gallup.com/workplace>

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So, the next time you walk into a space and think, "Damn, this feels good," pay attention. That's dopamine talking. And in the modern workplace, that's exactly what we should be designing for.



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